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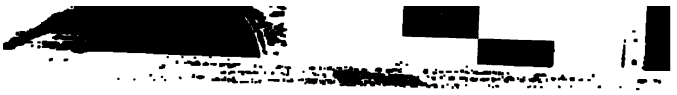
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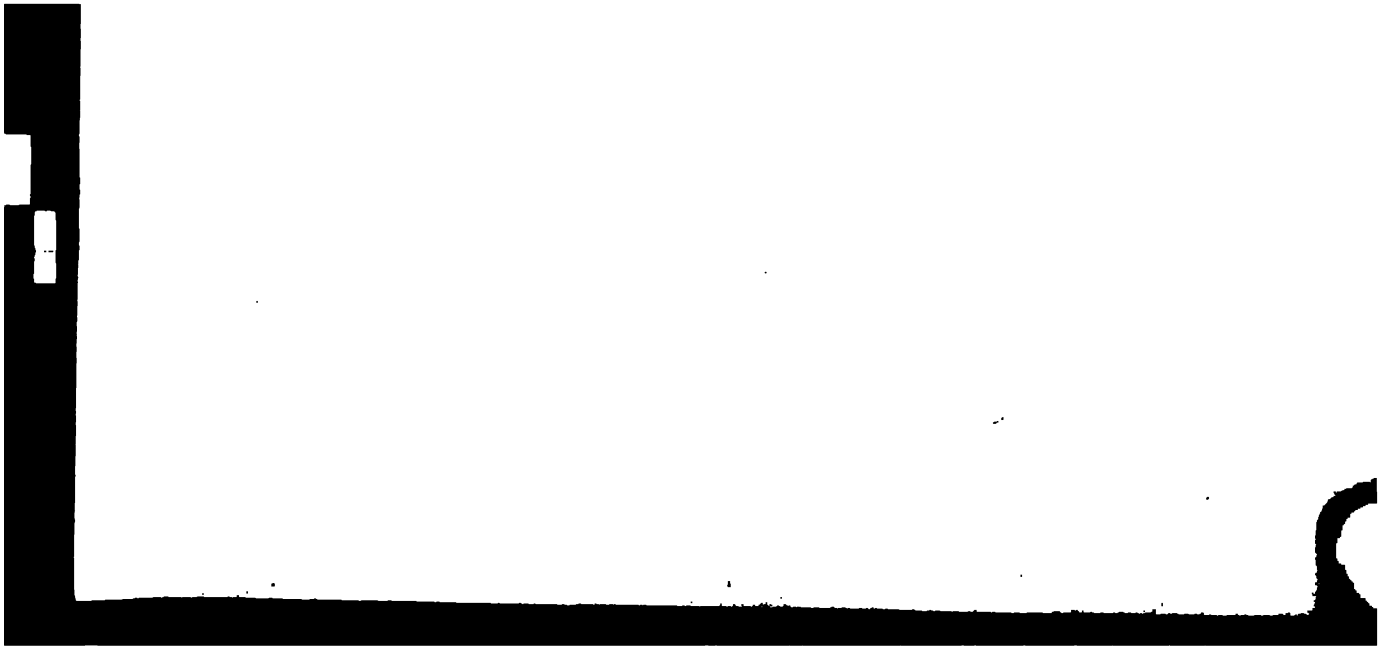
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# THE HARBOR ROAD

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"The Taming of Zenas Henry"
"The Wayfarers at The Angel's"
etc.

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To

A. H. B.

*this book is devotedly*
*inscribed*



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Out of the wrinkled bosom of the Old
New England once was born — a rock-hewn race,
Puritan pilgrims, splendidly pure and grim.

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL.



# THE HARBOR ROAD

## CHAPTER I

### TWO SEAFARERS

THE harbor road, golden in the sunshine of a June day; a dome of cloudless sky; a reach of ocean azure to its furthest rim; and on the breast of Wilton Bay a dot of white travelling rapidly seaward.

As Deborah Harlow crossed the room from the stove to the kitchen sink she could see the speck of sail that threaded its way through the distant channel, and she shrugged her shoulders.

"Anybody'd think there was nothin' on earth to do this mornin' but philander in a boat," she observed scornfully. "I believe Nate would rather be in that *Sylph* than eat, an' Tressie too; but I hadn't the heart to stop their goin' to-day. They've buckled down here now for quite a spell, an' they were gettin' restless as a pair of gulls. Besides, it'll be some time before they'll go again," she added grimly.

As she spoke she poured out a quantity of water from the steaming kettle and vigorously beat the

soap-shaker round in it until a foam of snowy suds overflowed the sides of the dishpan.

"I wonder what they'll say when I tell 'em," she murmured.

In the meantime the speeding yawl heeled in the breeze, dipping her sails to the very crest of the combers through which she cut her way, and tossing rainbows of spray into the face of the girl who bent to raise the centreboard of the tiny craft.

Merrily Tressie dashed the brine from her eyes.

There was a faint grating sound as the keel of the boat scraped the bar.

"What luck to find the water deep enough to scratch across the shoals, Uncle Nate!" she cried. "If this breeze holds we can make the Channel easily and come back on the noon tide. Oh, isn't it good to feel the wind in your face, and taste the salt on your lips! What a day to be alive!"

She threw her head backward in an abandon of delight.

"There certain ain't much the matter with the day," agreed the man at the tiller. "Lord, but you'd oughter been a boy, Tressie! I never did see since time began such a critter for a boat. Anybody'd think you'd been born an' reared under the Southern Cross or just off the Horn."

"I feel as if I had," was the quick response. "When I'm in the *Sylph* it seems as if I could love all my enemies and do good to them that hate

me. The sea is in my blood. All we Harlows have it — that is, all of us except Aunt Deborah."

"Your aunt ain't much on ocean goin', is she?" mused the man, a faint shadow clouding his face. "Sometimes, though, I think she cares more for the water than she'll own. You know it ain't her way to gush. She's awful close-mouthed concernin' what she likes."

"But not concernin' what she doesn't like, Uncle Nate," the girl put in with mischievous promptness.

"Well — n-o-o. She does speak up kinder smart at times. But for all that she's a mighty good woman, Tressie."

The final sentence carried in it an intonation of reproof.

"Of course she is, dear. Don't I know that? It is only that sometimes I wish she wasn't quite so good and was just a little more comfortable; don't you?"

The man flushed guiltily.

"I s'pose you couldn't say she was exactly comfortable," he admitted with obvious reluctance. "But I reckon that's because she always has so much on her mind. When she comes toward you under full sail you somehow feel 'twould be just as well not to cross her bows. It's lucky, mebbe, folks ain't all made same's her, 'cause if they was they'd all be wantin' the right o' way, an' nobody'd be

willin' to do the turnin' out. As 'tis most people measure her up 'bout as she is, an' make room for her. I always do, goodness knows. It's come to be second nature to me after livin' with her upwards of fifty years."

"But don't you ever rebel, Uncle Nate? You must have ideas and opinions of your own."

"Oh, I have plenty of opinions," owned the man slowly. "But I know quick as they're hatched they likely won't hold a candle to hers. Every time I've ever put in my oar I've been sorry afterwards."

He paused.

"There was the paintin' of the kitchen floor, now," continued he thoughtfully. "The minute I got the stuff mixed up Deborah poked her head in at the shed door an' announced quicker'n scat it was too yaller. I stuck to it 'twarn't. It *was* too yaller. Every day since I put it on I've realized that. She never said nothin' more 'cept that she knew how 'twould be. She's an awful capable woman, your aunt is. I've learned now not to meddle with her much. Besides," he added, brightening, "she lets me have things the way I want 'em on this boat. That's somethin'. She's never come drum-majorin' aboard here like she does at home."

Tressie sighed.

"The only way to get on with your aunt, Tressie,

as I've told you a hundred times, is not to interfere with her. Do exactly as she says an' you won't raise no ructions."

"But I don't like doing exactly as she says, Uncle Nate," protested Tressie with spirit. "I almost never think as she does."

"That's all right, dear heart," drawled the man soothingly. "No more do I. All we've got to do is not to say so."

"I try — truly I do," was the answer. "I never mean to annoy her. But you see we're nothing alike."

"You certainly ain't."

He grinned as if the comparison amused him.

"There, there, child; don't you go frettin' 'bout your aunt," he resumed kindly. "She thinks a sight of you, even if she does have a queer way of showin' it sometimes."

He bent forward and patted the small brown hand resting on the edge of the boat.

Instantly a smile flashed between the two.

"I wish everybody in the world was like you, Uncle Nate."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the fisherman. "Don't say it. Why, all the front parlors would be full of cod-lines, an' all the kitchen clocks run down; not to mention everybody's oar-locks an' rubber boots bein' missin'. There'd be the very devil to pay!"

He burst into a hearty laugh that grooved his face into a myriad of wrinkles and narrowed his eyes to mere lines of brightness that sparkled beneath his shaggy brows.

It was a patient yet far from spiritless face, bronzed and deeply marked, with a kindly humor beaming from its every feature. The hair was white, but a ruddy color and stalwart physique banished any suggestion of age; even the hand that gripped the tiller was young, its long fingers bespeaking strength as well as skill.

The girl who held the halyard was small, slender, and dark. Her face was tanned to a gypsy beauty and, with its arching brows, delicate nose and chin, was youthfully piquant. A witching light danced in the brown eyes, and the cant of the head suggested both pride and willfulness. It was a sensitive face in which shifting moods instantly mirrored themselves, registering every shade of feeling that swept the personality behind it. To a subtle student of human nature the countenance would have been an open page; but to the cruder psychologist it was not only puzzling but tantalizing. In fact Tressie blended in her character just enough of the exotic to be a never failing enigma to Wilton folk. Her love of the sea, her daring, her democracy were traits shared in common and easily understood; but her eerie beauty, her complexity of nature, and her indefinable elfin charm all hinted

of spheres unknown, and bewildered their unimaginative souls. They loved but they never solved her.

When Nate Harlow had brought her, a child of three, home in his arms, and had placed her in those of his sister Deborah consternation had reigned in the small Cape Cod village. Whatever were a middle-aged bachelor and his old-maid sister to do with a baby? Of course as both the father and the mother of the waif had perished at sea she must be cared for by somebody, and undoubtedly it was fitting that her uncle and aunt should take her into their home until she was old enough to shift for herself. But why need they adopt her? They had none too much of this world's goods as it was, and it would mean much self-sacrifice to have a third person share their slender income indefinitely. Such generosity seemed to Wilton needlessly quixotic. However, there was no counseling the Harlows. Deborah's conscience had always bent her backwards, people said. If she decided a thing was her duty nothing under heaven could hinder her doing it. As for Nate — well, it never mattered much what he thought, for it was Deborah who made up their minds, first her own, then his.

Accordingly Tressie Harlow became the daughter of the old homestead on the sea's margin, and if the child Deborah so painstakingly reared had blossomed into a creature that proved a riddle to

her foster-mother it was no one's fault. Unswervingly the woman fulfilled her obligations — ever groping, never fathoming.

A stolid soul was Deborah, a person whose every characteristic had its root in stern New Englandism. She had always seen life through serious eyes, for she had been born a care-taker and never experienced the joyous abandon of childhood.

Nate was different. Although she would not have confessed it, Deborah found him a sore trial. She forgave, tolerated, scolded, and prayed for him, but notwithstanding her sisterly solicitude he did not mend his ways. He possessed not one of the earmarks of the Harlows, and loyal as she was to those of her kin Deborah could not but lament his short-comings. The buoyancy of youth which had passed her by still lingered over him, refusing, despite his years, to give place to a proper maturity. It seemed as if he would never grow up, but instead would forever retain his infantile faith in the world and in its children — a sad condition of mind, to Deborah's way of thinking. He was too generous; too easily imposed upon; too ready to make a jest of graver matters. Some day, Deborah warned him, he would regret accepting every word he heard as gospel truth. Up to the present time, however, Nathan had not reached that state of grace. All along the shore he was beloved for his simple kindliness. He loaned his money broad-

cast; sat with sick and dying neighbors; and would gladly have given a friend the shoes from off his feet if such sacrifice had been required; and still he did not learn better. But the village never taxed him with these defects. Its summary of Nate's make-up was quite at odds with Deborah's estimate, public opinion being that Nate Harlow's only flaw was a lack of ability to rise up and assert himself.

Of the great deeps of the man's nature Wilton saw little nor, perhaps, did it credit him with possessing any very profound passion. Nevertheless, far beneath Nate's easy-going exterior lay a force mighty and dynamic. This was his adoration for his niece Tressie. A bond firm as steel bound the two together. They had many mutual loves to unite them: their joy in the sun, the sand, the sea; their delight in the whirling of the gulls over the white dunes; their wordless ecstasy at the salt crimson of the wayside roses. In addition to these aesthetic links were they not joined in the fetters of a dominating and antagonistic condition of living, an irritating environment which daily rasped each and from which there was no escape? This latter tie was possibly one of the strongest strands in the cable that held them together, the only more potent element being their complete congeniality.

For where Deborah failed in comprehending Tressie, Nathan understood.

It was not the understanding growing out of a similarity of disposition, but rather the vision granted varying natures through the insight of a great love. For Nathan Harlow loved Tressie better than he loved his own soul. She was his pearl, his dearest possession. When she smiled he was at peace; and when her face darkened into sadness his heart was tortured and he could find no rest until the shadow had been put to flight.

Not that he loved her to the exclusion of his sister. The Harlows were a clannish family, and furthermore he was too loyal a brother for that. He respected, admired, esteemed Deborah. To her every virtue he paid its full tithe of appreciation. All that she was in executiveness, in soundness of judgment, in immutability of principle — all the attributes she boasted which he himself lacked he revered and never ceased to marvel at. Her very self-sufficiency and power, however, had eliminated from her personality that feminine unevenness of temperament, and dependence of nature in which lies womanhood's greatest charm. So far as Nate was concerned Deborah was an entirely sexless creature who made no appeal to his protecting instincts. She was merely another fellow-being. Nevertheless, with the same staunchness that led him to laud her virtues he tried zealously to explain away, defend, and apologize for her faults. This was far less difficult for him than for Tressie,

for he had served a long apprenticeship beneath his sister's yoke. But Tressie was young, high-spirited, and of a feminism so highly developed that her very existence was a force arraigned against her aunt. The touch of coquetry in her dress, the very ripples in her hair, were at variance with Deborah's Puritan austerity, and to the elder woman seemed deliberately to court masculine attention. However, that may be, it was true that wherever Tressie Harlow went "men swayed to her in their orbits as they moved," being as conscious that she was a woman as they were unconscious that Deborah was one. Yet it was not the girl's fault. It was only that Tressie was a born daughter of Eve, while Deborah was only a sort of step-child of her distinguished progenitor.

Between these two women stood Nathan Harlow, eagerly employing his understanding of each to smooth the constant friction that resulted from the clash of their contrasting natures; and when there was no smoothing it he willingly interposed himself between them to turn aside the sparks thrown off by the impact of their unavoidably close relation.

On which of the three the burden of existence fell heaviest it would be difficult to say. Whether it was Deborah against whose adamantine laws the others continually offended; or Tressie whose temperamental nature had been curbed until it was at

the breaking point; or poor Nathan himself, who like a messenger between the worlds forever ran back and forth pouring oil on the troubled waters.

Certainly one could not but sigh for Deborah who, despite her self-sufficiency, knew herself to be without the pale of comradeship with the other two. How earnestly she had tried to bridge that gulf! What clumsy attempts she had made to be one with the thought and interest of those so dear to her! And how she had failed! No one knew it better than she. The throbbing sea did not lure her to its bosom, nor could she stifle her disapproval of loitering in its company. As for the crimson-toned rose which the salt breeze rioted, in her estimation as in that of Peter Bell it was a crimson rose and it was nothing more. To the practical Deborah there was too much to do for her to spend time in "flyin' to pieces over everything that went on out of doors." The sky, the ocean, and the things that grew were well enough. She liked hot sunshine for bleaching her clothes, and a fresh breeze for drying them. The beach sand, too, kept her kitchen table white. But the mechanism of the physical was too important for her to consider the outer world other than an accessory to her domestic menage. As for Tressie and Nate, they much better be at home braiding rugs or chopping kindlings than be idling out to sea.

The latter thought was still uppermost in her

mind when at noontime she beheld the nautical culprits come swinging homeward across the dunes. There was a spring in the girl's step, an elasticity in the man's stride that was always there after they had been sailing. Even at a distance Deborah could tell that they were in an annoyingly uplifted mood.

She sniffed.

"Mebbe it's just as well they went an' got perked up like this before I tell 'em," she remarked significantly. "It'll make things easier."



## CHAPTER II

### A FAMILY CONCLAVE

WHEN the door opened Deborah did not turn to greet them, but continued dishing up the chowder from the iron kettle that stood on the stove.

Tressie, however, who was in high good humor, went straight to her aunt, and passing an arm affectionately over the angular shoulders cried:

"Such a morning as we've had, Aunt Deborah! The air was all salty from the east and the ocean ruffled into the most fascinating little billows!"

Deborah drew away.

She detested demonstration; nor was the thought of the fascinating little billows a pleasant one.

"There, there, child," she answered a trifle impatiently, though not unkindly, "I'm glad if you had a good time. Do go now and brush your hair before dinner. I can't bear to see those stragglin' locks round your forehead an' ears. It don't look tidy. Nathan, hang your coat out in the shed, an' go fill the water pitcher. Step right along brisk, 'cause you're late already an' I want you should hurry through your dinner. I've got somethin' to tell you afterwards."

The speech fell like a frosty zephyr upon a tropical garden.

Although it was not ill-tempered its curtness brought the dreamers forcefully back to the actual, shattering the joyous aftermath of the morning. With its cadence the glow faded from Tressie's eyes. Turning quietly she went up stairs while Nathan, in whose beaming face an answering light was also extinguished, obediently seized the water pitcher. Once more they were under Deborah's domination!

When a few moments later Tressie dropped into her chair at the table the little curls about her brow were as severely smoothed as their rippling tendencies would permit.

Gravely Nate ladled out the chowder.

A pall seemed to have descended on the day.

Silently the meal proceeded.

"The minister's wife has been here this mornin'," observed Deborah, at last breaking the silence.

"Mrs. Perkins? What did she want?" inquired Tressie brightly.

"She just stopped to ask you an' me round there Monday afternoon. She's got a new knittin' pattern she wants to show us."

"I don't see why people always feel they must ask both of us everywhere just as if we were the salt and the pepper," Tressie laughed with one of her merry flashes. "I've always pitied the salt. It

must be so annoying never to be able to separate itself from the pepper."

Deborah met the girl's whimsy with matter-of-fact unsmilingness.

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talkin' about, Tressie," she replied with injured dignity. "If you mean you don't like goin' places with me I must confess it ain't very kind of you, to say nothin' of your callin' me the pepper."

"Oh, come now, Deborah," put in Nathan, who had chuckled with appreciation at the jest, "don't go takin' it that way. Tressie was only foolin'. What she meant was folks never seemed to think of one of you without thinkin' of the other, same's we think of the oil an' the vinegar."

"'Tain't a mite pleasanter to be called the vinegar, Nathan, than the pepper," declared his sister, unappeased. "If you an' Tressie consider me —"

"Bless my soul, Deborah, but we don't," interrupted Nathan hurriedly. "Course we don't think you're like either of them things. It was just a joke. Come, don't think no more about it. What was it you had to tell us?"

Deborah pushed back her plate.

"It's no way to be talkin' at table, with all the dishes lyin' round you unwashed," she answered shortly. "We'll get things cleared up first an' talk afterwards. Finish up that chowder, Tressie. Don't dawdle. An' don't be so finicky about eatin'

the potato. It's good for you. Nobody has a right to waste perfectly good victuals."

Rebelliously Tressie cut the generous cubes of potato into smaller bits with her spoon.

"Now, Nathan," went on Deborah, bustling up from her chair, "while Tressie an' I are doin' the dishes you can take what's left in that saucepan out to the hens. An' since you're there you might just as well put a nail or two on the edge of the screen door; I see the nettin's comin' off."

As Nathan crossed the room to obey, his eye was caught by the morning paper lying face uppermost in a chair. He stooped and picked it up.

"You certainly ain't goin' to readin' now, Nathan, after doin' nothin' all the mornin', are you?" came in exasperated tones from Deborah.

The paper dropped.

"No, no — of course not," responded the man quickly. "I was just glancin' at the headin's."

"It does beat all, Nathan Harlow, how you always go wanderin' off from whatever you set out to do! There'll be plenty of time for you to see those headin's by an' by. Go right along now an' feed the hens."

Nathan seized the saucepan and went out, the door closing after him with a sharp click.

"Your uncle's an awful good man, Tressie, but he ain't never had any purpose in life," sighed Deborah. "He lets himself be led aside by anything

he comes across, even a newspaper. If he'd been born with more stamner we'd 'a' been a sight better off now. But he never could say *No* to anybody, let 'em ask what they might. I s'pose he's lent the folks of this town, an' all the other towns round about here for that matter, enough money to build a lighthouse if you was to get it all together. He's still doin' it, too. I can't stop him. Anybody can get every dollar there is in his pocket by tellin' him they've lost their boat; or they've got a sick wife at home. Any such yarn is enough for your uncle. He can't keep a cent. It's money that I want to talk to you an' him about."

Tressie dimpled into a smile.

"Oh, I thought you had something dreadful to tell us, Aunt Deborah," she replied with a breath of relief. "I was afraid —"

"Well, if you don't call bein' without funds enough to buy your food dreadful I don't know what would be a calamity in your eyes," cut in Deborah severely. "Your uncle ain't laid by anythin' this spring, between his easy-goin' ways an' his havin' no luck fishin'. There's all sorts of bills to be paid, an' I don't know where the cash is comin' from to pay 'em. I warn't never one to run in debt. We've got to get money from somewhere, that's all there is to it."

As Tressie regarded her aunt, her eyes widened with dismay.

"Do — do we owe much money?"

"Enough so somethin's got to be done about it," snapped Deborah.

"But what can we do?"

The cry was that of a terrified child who for the first time confronted some strange and awesome spectre.

"I s'pose you wouldn't have a notion which way to turn — you nor your uncle either. You're like a pair of bal s in the wood. It's lucky there's one person in this house ain't afraid to look life in the face."

As she spoke Deborah finished scouring out the dishpan, spread the towels and dish-cloth carefully to dry, and wiped her hands.

"Tell your uncle to leave fixin' that screen door now an' come in," she said. "We may's well thresh this thing out, an' have it over."

Tressie sped to do her bidding.

Something in the girl's voice must have struck alarm to Nate's ear, for he tossed aside his hammer with unusual alacrity and with perturbed face followed her into the house.

Deborah, like some sinister spirit about to pronounce doom upon the universe, sat enthroned in the stiffest chair in the living-room. It would not be fair to say that she exulted in the unpleasant duty before her; she did, however, seem to derive a certain grim satisfaction from her task. There are

those who by nature find a keener delight in spreading ill news than good tidings, and Deborah was one of these.

"Sit down, both of you," she began.

She paused ominously, regarding her listeners' troubled faces.

"As I was tellin' Tressie just now, somethin's got to be done about our finances," she went on. "We ain't makin' both ends meet by a good sight. Of course we can't go on livin' on the ragged edge of nothin' like this all winter. If we had half the money you've loaned, or rather *given* to the shiftless families along this coast, Nathan Harlow, there'd be no need of talkin' about bein' cramped. But long's you'd rather feed other folk's households than your own, why, Tressie an' me will have to bear the consequences."

She saw him wince.

"I'd no idea we were really runnin' behind," he stammered, aghast.

"You wouldn't have. You always seem to feel there's no bottom to the family purse," rejoined Deborah tartly. "It's small thanks to you there's ever a dime in the house."

Indignantly Tressie opened her lips; but the man motioned her to be silent.

"Well," continued Deborah, "there's no good to be got by talkin' this way any more. You can't make folks over, I've convinced myself of that. I

reckon we've got to take the relations the Lord has sent us an' rejoice they warn't no worse. You're a kind brother, Nathan — I ain't denyin' that; but sometimes you're awful tryin'."

With forbearance Nate accepted the rebuke. He did not retort that Heaven had also bestowed relatives upon him — relatives who constantly taxed his patience and adaptability.

Instead, he smiled wistfully into Deborah's face.

"I'm dretful sorry you've been worried, Deborah," he returned gently.

"Bein' sorry is all well enough in its way, but it don't go far toward settlin' things," Deborah declared. "The question is, what are we goin' to do?"

"Well, what *are* we goin' to do?"

In spite of herself Deborah smiled.

"If that ain't for all the world like you, Nathan," said she. "To fall back on me like a log the minute there's a crisis in the family."

"I knew you probably had some plan."

"I have."

He settled comfortably back into the black haircloth rocking-chair.

Of course Deborah had a plan. She always had one. And furthermore whatever it was it was evident that she expected him and Tressie to accept it without discussion. That was what "*talkin' things over*" always meant in the Harlow home.

"Well," he drawled, "what is it? Let's have it."

"Boarders."

"Boarders!"

"Yes."

"Boarders?" he repeated incredulously. *"Boarders?"*

"Why not?"

"But boarders — boarders in Wilton!" faltered he with a sickly grin. "It seems so queer, somehow."

He hitched forward to the edge of the chair, poising himself with agitated rigidity.

"You see, none of the people in this village have ever took a boarder," he ventured half-timidly. "It's kinder out of keepin' with Wilton."

"The folks of this place have got a lot of foolish notions they'd oughter get over," was the crisp retort. "There ain't no reason in the world why they shouldn't take boarders. It's done in 'most all the towns along the Cape."

"But not in Wilton."

"No matter. Somebody's got to begin it, an' I mean to be the one."

Nate stared at her helplessly.

"But how could you get a-holt of any boarders?" he inquired, catching hopefully at the straw.

"I've got a-holt of 'em already."

The man bounded from the rocker, then sat down again.

"I've not only got the boarders," continued his sister triumphantly, "but they're comin' Saturday — a woman from out West somewheres an' her daughter; an' another woman from Boston an' her son."

"Four of 'em? Good Lord! An' they're comin' the day after tomorrow, you say?"

Deborah nodded.

"How long are they goin' to stay?"

"All summer."

"All sum— ! All summer! My land, Deborah, but you have took a contract on your hands!"

"I ain't took it on," Deborah protested. "Ain't we all a-doin' it? Ain't we just talked it over an' decided 'twas the best thing to do? Ain't I tellin' you all about it before they come? I haven't took nothin' on my hands, Nathan Harlow. It's you an' Tressie as well as me is doin' it; an' we've all three got to pull together an' carry it through. It will mean shiftin' our rooms round, of course; an' more cookin', too. Tressie's to do the chamber-work, an' the waitin' on table."

The girl started, a wave of crimson surging to her cheek.

"Couldn't I help in the kitchen instead, Aunt Deborah?" she pleaded eagerly. "Maybe we could get some one else to wait on the boarders. I'm perfectly willing to do my part, only I'd rather —"

"If you really want to do your part waitin' on

table is the best way to do it," declared Deborah inflexibly. "Of course if you are goin' to set yourself up as bein' too grand to work I 'spose I can manage to wait on the boarders myself, though just how I can manage to be in two places at once I don't see."

Tressie bit her lip.

"I'll do whatever you want me to," she answered, subsiding into meekness.

"That's right," her aunt returned, slightly mollified. "We must all learn to do our duty in this world whether it's to our likin' or not. Two chances out of three it won't be. But likin' it ain't the question, Tressie. We've just got to do it, whether or no."

"An' what am I goin' to do?" piped Nate jocosely, eager to turn the subject into a more cheerful channel.

"You? Well, there's one thing you won't do, an' that's go idlin' all day in that boat," retorted Deborah promptly. "There'll be plenty of chores for you to do on land, without your goin' off in the *Sylph*. You'll have wood to chop; water to fetch; fish to clean; clams to dig; an' windows to wash. I guess time won't hang heavy on your hands. Besides, you'll have to keep the grass cut now, an' have things perked up ship-shape round the place."

Nathan crumpled up as this program with its

possibilities for expansion flitted before his imagination.

"Oh, I daresay mebbe you'll go boatin' now an' then," went on his sister, influenced by one of her sudden waves of kindness. "The woman from the West, Mrs. Mayhew, asked if we had a boat, an' wrote that likely she an' her daughter might want to hire it by the month. I kinder gathered from what she said they'd never been to the seashore, an' was anxious to do all the things folks did. She asked a sight of questions: the size of the boat, its name, if it was safe, an' whether you was used to sailin' it."

Tressie and Nate burst into a simultaneous peal of laughter.

"I figger the Mayhews are folks of means," continued Deborah, "or they wouldn't be talkin' of hirin' a boat by the month."

"Lord, Deborah, I shan't let 'em hire it," exclaimed Nate quickly. "I'll take 'em sailin' an' welcome whenever they want to go."

"Yes, that would be just like you, Nathan," was the stinging rejoinder. "You'd be glad, I 'spose, for any excuse to get aboard that boat. Why don't you feed 'em free, too, an' be done with it? If you ain't enough to exasperate the apostle Paul! What are we gettin' these folks here for? To give 'em a good time? You seem to clean forget this is a

plan to make money. But I ain't forgettin' it, not for one minute. I'm goin' to charge 'em for everything — for sailin', an' goin' bathin', an'—"

"Bathin'? Why, Deborah, you wouldn't have the face to charge a person money for sousin' round in the salt water, I hope," protested Nate. "Ain't it the Lord's ocean?"

"The ocean may be the Lord's, but the bathhouses ain't," was the dry reply. "No, sir! If I'm to be put to the trouble of openin' up the front parlor, an' takin' the covers off the spare-room furniture I'm goin' to get somethin' out of it. I mean to charge 'em for everythin', an' charge 'em good. That's the way folks do. Summer boarders expect to pay."

"Well, you needn't ask me to do it."

"I certainly shan't. I know too much about you for that. I'll make the prices, an' I'll take the money, an' then we'll know we're gettin' somewheres." She rose. "An' now that we've settled things we may's well go to work gettin' the house to rights. I've done quite a lot by myself already, but I couldn't move the heavy furniture. The Mayhew woman wants two rooms on the cool side of the house, an' lookin' out to sea — a room for herself an' one for Dora. An' Dora's room must be a very quiet one 'cause she's such a light sleeper. I wanted to ask her what she thought she was likely to hear at night. Wilton's silent as the grave after

eight o'clock. There certainly won't be no noise unless she makes it herself. She an' Dora mean to go bathin' every day; an' they want a beach to set on."

"I 'spose you're goin' to charge 'em for the beach, too," murmured Nathan, a twinkle in his eye.

"No, I guess not."

"There ain't any very convenient way of measurin' it off — that's true," observed the man humorously.

"What about the other people who are coming?" Tressie inquired.

"The Minots? Oh, they warn't so fussy. They seemed to have more of an idea what they were gettin' into. I reckon likely they've been to the Cape before — Mrs. Minot an' her little boy. I'm goin' to put her in my room, an' the boy in the parlor bedroom. I imagine his mother won't like havin' him separated from her, nor fancy the notion of his sleepin' on the ground floor; but it's the best I can do."

"What is his name, Aunt Deborah?"

"Name? Whose name? The boy's? Now, what earthly difference does that make? Let me see. I don't remember what it was his mother called him. It's here in the letter somewheres, though."

From the old secretary the woman drew forth a much fingered missive.

"As I recall it 'twas on the third page she men-

tioned him," remarked Deborah. "Yes, here it is. She calls him Norman. *My boy Norman.*"

"Norman Minot," repeated Tressie slowly. "What a beautiful name!"

"A foolish, high-falutin' name, in my opinion," came sharply from Deborah. "His mother much better have named him something sensible like John or Thomas."

## CHAPTER III

### DEBORAH MAKES STRAIGHT THE HIGHWAY

In order that the way might be paved for the advent of the summer boarders it was necessary to follow out two distinct introductory measures. One of these was a simple matter, consisting merely of the preparation of the Harlow homestead for its new occupants; the other was the far more difficult task of preparing Wilton for its migratory guests. If the town was to receive the visitors with any degree of warmth whatsoever Deborah foresaw that the right keynote must be struck, and the striking of this note demanded all the skill of a trained diplomat. It did not seem wise to send either Nathan or Tressie upon this delicate mission, since at the outset neither of them was any too much in accord with the plan. A little sympathy might wreck their hard won acquiescence, argued Deborah, and urge them to revolt.

Accordingly she herself set forth — first to the minister's; then to the store; and afterward to the homes of Zenas Henry, Lyman Bearse, John Bartlett, and the Howlands. These comprised the rep-

resentative families of the town, and she depended upon their verdict to color public opinion. She did not, however, deceive herself with any false hopes that her expedition would be a pleasant one. She knew she was acting against every Wilton tradition. Yet forearmed as she was, she was quite unprepared to find her undertaking as difficult as it proved.

On every hand wrath and opposition greeted her. Not only did no one announce himself willing to stand sponsor for the scheme, but nobody considered it a plan of the least practicability. It was hailed by her neighbors with the utmost scorn, most of them declaring without reserve that no good would come of it.

Wilton agreed to be courteous to the strangers; it was too well-bred to do otherwise. But Deborah must neither expect nor demand cordiality toward her guests.

Poor Deborah!

With a heavy heart she trudged homeward.

The hamlet was pitiless.

"I, for one, am downright glad folks spoke their minds to Deborah Harlow," announced Zenas Henry. "It's good for her to have some one speak up to her once in a while. Nobody ever does. I gave it to her straight from the shoulder, I can tell you. I ain't afraid of her."

"Mebbe if you had to live with her year in an'

year out you wouldn't be so cocky," suggested Phineas Taylor.

"Live with her!" sputtered Zenas Henry. "Say, I wouldn't live with that woman an' be led round by the nose like Nate is for a thousand dollars. Poor chap! I reckon he's too old now ever to rise up an' be anybody. But that girl Tressie's a high-stepper. She's got plenty of devil in her, an' if the day doesn't dawn when she gets to the end of her rope with her aunt, I'll miss my guess."

He chuckled.

"I'm just a-waitin' for that moment to hail in sight, an' when it does I'll back the little one for all I'm worth. I'm awful fond of that child. She's a fine girl, Tressie Harlow."

"I guess she tries Deborah's soul a good deal," remarked Abbie, glancing up from her mending. "She always was an odd little critter. Won't wear a flannel petticoat, Deborah says. Think of it! I don't believe there's another woman on the Cape that don't wear one. But Tressie won't. An' when Deborah started arguin' about it, an' told her all New England women for generations back had wore 'em, Tressie just laughed an' said then it was high time they stopped doin' it."

"Good for her!" cried Zenas Henry, rubbing his hands. "I like her spirit. Wouldn't I just relish seein' a good set-to between her an' Deborah! Wouldn't I, though!"

Perhaps this longing was shared secretly, if not openly, throughout Wilton where Deborah's high-handed tactics had not rendered her a general favorite. True, she was universally respected; and when the church carpet had to be laid she was much in demand. The women also liked her help at the Grange, where her executive genius was duly appreciated. When, however, neighbors met together for an afternoon of friendly gossip Deborah was seldom invited. She was too stiff, they said; too outspoken; too ready to denounce the opinions of others.

In vague though apparently unmoved fashion, Deborah sensed this antagonism and was more hurt by it than she would have confessed. She knew her inward nature was far worthier than her outward; yet she was constantly belying herself, and with dumb helplessness afterward reaping the consequences of her lack of tact. She was sharp-tongued when acidity of speech was mere habit; and she was coldly undemonstrative when deep in her heart throbbed unvoiceable affection.

Alas for Deborah!

The gods had indeed fettered her better self in cruel shackles. From the cradle to the grave she must ever bear the odium of misrepresentation.

Although she was not introspective enough to solve perfectly the riddle of her character she nevertheless faced her limitations with sufficient honesty

to accept them with a certain crude philosophy. She realized that the very response she coveted in others was repelled by her personality. Tressie's outbursts of affection gratified and delighted her; yet it was as natural for her to suppress them as it was for her to breathe. Instead of passing a caressing hand over the girl's hair, or bending to kiss her cheek, Deborah demonstrated her affection by scrubbing her niece's bedroom, ironing her clothes, mending her stockings; and all these kindly offices she performed to a running accompaniment of fault-finding and rebuke. In her desire not to spoil the girl she adopted the New England creed of never commending or approving anything she did.

If Tressie was a daughter of Eve and Deborah only some distant connection of that worthy mother of the race, the elder woman was at least the unchallenged child of stern Duty.

In her method of grappling with the emergency of the hour Deborah was in every way consistent with her birthright. She could see before her but one course of action, and this she pursued with relentlessness, let the town disapprove as it might. Her policy being once frankly stated she gave the condemnation of the villagers no further thought, proceeding with zest to the other half of her program — that of making ready the house.

This was not so much of an undertaking as it might have appeared, since Deborah was such an

excellent housekeeper that her domicile was always immaculate. Hence there was little to do beyond removing the shrouds from the furniture, and airing the unused rooms. It was not the physical labor incurred by this task that rendered it irksome; rather Deborah shrank from the disagreeable necessity of opening the rooms at all.

Had not the morning-glory paper in the spare-room withstood the onslaughts of years of sunshine, and retained unfaded its pristine splendor solely because its flowers had bloomed in a subterranean light? Oh, the pang it cost to draw aside the curtains and let in the glare of day! And the mahogany four-poster, and swell-front bureau so carefully draped in sheets! Generations of Harlows had lived and died in company with that chamber-set. And now at this late day in its history, it must be offered up to be scratched and battered.

Deborah sighed.

Then there were the braided rugs, that had been rolled in newspaper ever since the hour they had been finished, and had never yet been defiled by the foot of man. It seemed a tragedy to put them down. No one but a New England housewife knew how many hours of toil had been consumed in the making of those rugs — in cutting the strips, piecing them, untangling the long strands, and braiding them together. How the linen thread had cut the fingers when, like ever-widening ripples on a

pond, the circling masterpiece had been firmly sewn into place.

As for the front parlor, that shrine which was ever enveloped in darkness — here Deborah was even more unwilling to admit the intruder. Within the room was the black haircloth set formerly used by her parents, no trace of wear marring its slippery surface. Here also hung her mother's and her grandmother's samplers, and the wreath of wax flowers fashioned by the deft fingers of Great-aunt Dolliver; to say nothing of the fruit pieces woven from hair culled from the heads of innumerable dead and gone Harlows.

The family albums Deborah decided to put away. She could not bear to think of a parcel of curious strangers prying into their pages. The pictures, however, should remain as they were. *God Bless Our Home, Mercy's Dream,* and *The Burial of The Pet Bird* were good enough for anybody. Perhaps she would shift *The Sale of the Pet Lamb* to the dining-room, where it would cover up the spot on the east wall, and balance *The Great American Whaler.* If she was altogether sure the Minot boy was not a meddlesome child she could leave the model of Grandfather Dolliver's square-rigger, *The Dauntless,* where it had always stood on the sitting-room mantelpiece. But boys were so careless! Now-a-days, too, their mothers let them handle everything they saw. The children of her genera-

tion had not been brought up that way, she was thankful to say. Well, it was useless to berate the race, even if it was steadily degenerating. One must, after all, accept the present as one found it.

With this bit of philosophy Deborah turned to the completion of her final arrangements. The beds were made, and the old blue and white Revolutionary counterpanes tucked over them; the pitchers were filled; and at last nothing remained for the family to do but sit with folded hands and await the arrival of the newcomers.

This prospect aroused in the breasts of the three Harlows widely differing emotions.

To Deborah the coming event was purely a business venture, to be transacted and carried through faithfully and unflinchingly. It did not worry her in the least, although it annoyed her mightily.

Nate, on the contrary, approached the innovation with terror. He had never before felt the slightest anxiety for his sister with relation to any enterprise she had seen fit to undertake. This time, however, the marrow clave unto his bones, and his heart beat with a strange uneasiness. As the crucial moment for the guests' appearance drew nearer he became panic-stricken, and would have given almost anything to have something intervene to avert the coming calamity.

But to Tressie the novel adventure brought with it a glow of anticipation. To have in one's own

home people who really lived in a city; who were accustomed to city sights, city sounds, city experiences; people who went to theatres, parties, wore pretty gowns; whirled here and there in motor-cars — it must all be so wonderful! To the girl reared amid the uneventful routine of Wilton such visitors were like travellers from the far East who brought with them Arabian Night tales of unknown lands.

She speculated as to the age of Dora Mayhew.

Was she a girl like herself, she wondered. What kind of gowns would she wear, and how would she dress her hair? Would the two become friends; and through the eyes of the city-bred stranger would she be able to catch glimpses of that fairy existence over which hung all the glamour of a dream-world?

Tressie loved her home — loved the wide blue sea; the silver dunes; and the low pines that breathed the benediction of their fragrance over Wilton. She loved her uncle, too, with ardent devotion; and her aunt, who had been to her the only mother she had ever known. Even the fisherfolk of the village were dear to her heart. Nevertheless the monotony of her daily existence as well as its lack of youthful companionship, sometimes raised within her a rebellious craving for the life others led. She longed for the ripple of silken attire, for soft lights, music, beauty, appreciation. Above all she longed for some one who could speak her own

language and answer with sympathy the mysterious unfoldings of her nature. Often she was filled with a great and overwhelming loneliness; a passionate yearning to be understood. There were girls in the world who had all for which she was starving. Why was it that some were born to such a heritage, and others were not?

"I suppose I'll just live and die in Wilton," she whispered to herself with a touch of bitterness. "I'll probably marry some man who smells of fish, and make chowder for him all my days."

As she shook out her hair she glanced into the old-fashioned, gilt-framed mirror hanging above her dressing-table. The face of a very pretty girl looked out at her — a girl whose brown eyes were brimming with tears, and on whose rounded cheeks great sparkling drops still lingered.

Tressie dashed them aside.

"How absurd!" she exclaimed with one of her characteristically rapid changes of mood. "I do believe I'm so sorry for myself I'm crying!"

A smile curved the pouting lips, and bending forward the girl blew a kiss from her finger-tips to her other self in the mirror.

"Cheer up, Tressie!" she exclaimed whimsically. "Don't begin by losing your courage. Things may turn out better than you think, my dear. And anyway, whether they do or not, you are powerless to help it."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ADVENT OF THE BOARDERS

WHATEVER the attitude of its people toward the newcomers it was evident that Wilton at least harbored no grudge at being invaded by strangers, for never had the hamlet presented a more alluring picture than it did from the harbor road on the day when the visitors were to arrive.

It was a day of splendor.

The blue of the sea, melting into emerald where bars of sand made shallow the water, stretched unruffled to meet a sky of azure; snowy sails crossed and re-crossed the vast ocean highway; and inland where clouds of circling gulls hovered, the crescent-shaped shore bordered the sweep of cobalt with a belt of white. It was a day when the sun kissed into warmth the dim silences of the woods, and sent shafts of gold to the hearts of the dusky pines.

Every fisherman who owned a boat was abroad on the deep, and those who were not sat smoking on upturned dories at the water's edge, or gossiped with one another from amid a tangle of nets spread high on the beach.

Nate Harlow would have given almost anything he possessed to have escaped into the *Sylph,* and turned her rudder toward the open sea. But alas, no such flight was possible. Instead, with constantly increasing uneasiness he loitered about the house, straining his ears for the sound of the stage when its wheels should come gritting down the harbor road.

Never before had his confidence in Deborah's judgment been so shaken.

The present enterprise brought with it nothing but dread. What would be the result of the mad scheme, he wondered — success or failure? And if, as now seemed probable, defeat should be the outcome, with what derision their watchful neighbors would greet the vanquished financiers! He wished the plan had been fathoms deep in the sea before Deborah had ever concocted it. The days, weeks, months, which must elapse before he would be able to return to the peace of an unmolested hearthside stretched before him a gulf of horror.

Although far less worried than he Deborah and Tressie were nevertheless quite as excited, and in order to beguile the final moments of suspense they resorted to all sorts of unnecessary afterthoughts.

For the hundredth time Deborah straightened the cloth on the supper-table, and rearranged the napkins. The new linen had been a colossal bargain. Its touch was like satin. Never had she

dreamed of owning such napery. She had chanced upon it one day at the Junction when a sale of sample linen was going on; and although the napkins differed in design, and had woven in their middles the names and crests of various hotels throughout the United States, the fact did not at all lessen her satisfaction in her purchase. On the contrary the markings afforded her the sensation of having travelled a great deal, and of living in constant and intimate touch with the more important centres of the country. It was unlikely, she argued with matter-of-fact logic, that she would ever have as her guests the owners of the Beacon Hotel at New Orleans, or of King's Inn at Baltimore; and even if she did she could easily explain how the napkins came to be in her possession.

Therefore she fingered them with housewifely serenity, praying in the meantime that the Minot boy would not prove to be an untidy child who would wreck her new property with fruit-stains. The masculine half of humanity did make so much trouble! What a pity that at the dawn of creation the Lord had not arranged affairs so the race might comprise only women. Nathan, she grudgingly admitted, was a degree better than most men; and yet even he hadn't much sense. That very morning he had actually proclaimed that he, for one, intended to sit down and eat with the boarders! Only the sheer force of her will had prevented this social

catastrophe. Even now he was sulking in the shed muttering that he was just as good as anybody, and that he considered it an outrage to be driven away from his own table. Men certainly were strange creatures. They seemed to have no sense of propriety.

While her aunt was engrossed with these musings Tressie had crept upstairs and as a silent message of welcome had quietly placed in the waiting bedrooms small vases filled with purple iris. She knew Deborah would not approve of her doing it. Her aunt scorned sentiment; and as for flowers she had always disliked having them about the house because they "cluttered things up."

Tressie, however, sensitive to every exponent of form or color found in the beautiful an untranslatable something that satisfied the hunger of her soul, and answered to some extent the cravings an austere bringing up had sought to stifle. She could not have told why a rose-lipped shell, or a trembling water-lily made more glad the day; or why a new joy came with the flush of the waves at sunset. But a throbbing delight within her answered every beauty of the surrounding world. She knew where the first arbutus, braving chill spring winds, unfurled its coral petals; where lady's-slipper and violet bloomed; where were the haunts of cardinal-flower and azalea. Yet whenever in an ecstasy of pleasure she bore these wood-

land children homeward, she was sure to be greeted by Deborah's fretful protest:

"I don't see, Tressie, why you can't be content with leavin' that truck where it grew. Folks warn't never intended to bring all out-doors into their houses. These flowers, shells, an' things make a dretful mess, an' don't do anybody a mite of good. I wish you'd let 'em be where you found 'em."

"Please let me keep them, Aunt Deborah," Tressie would beg. "I'll clear up after them."

"Let her have 'em, Deborah; let her have 'em," Nate would rejoin. "They don't do no harm, an' the child likes seein' 'em round. The Lord must have meant us to enjoy the things He made or He never would 'a' fussed to make 'em."

"I can enjoy 'em more out-doors, where they don't go droppin' all over everything," would be Deborah's invariable answer. "Still, if Tressie is willin' to keep brushin' up the litter they make I 'spose I oughtn't to have any objections. I call it a foolish waste of strength, though. It's a pity she's so concerned with dawdlin' over pretty things instead of puttin' her mind onto knittin', housework, an' religion."

"Give her time, Deborah," Nate would urge with more spirit than he usually exhibited. "Why, the girl's little more than a child yet."

"She'll never be anything but a child, either, if

you keep babyin' her as you do," would be Deborah's caustic retort.

Nevertheless the plea was not without its effect. While she did not encourage Tressie's pilgrimages to field and shore, Deborah did not actually forbid them; and the girl, accepting this grudging tolerance as consent, fetched home her forest-bred and sea-born treasures, delighting timidly in their beauty.

Even now as she stood upstairs contemplating with pleasure the shadowy image of the iris in the polished surface of the guest-room mahogany, a wordless joy thrilled her.

It was Deborah's cry that roused her from the reverie:

"The stage is comin'," she called shrilly from the kitchen. "I can see the horses' heads round the bend in the road. You're sure you filled the pitchers, Tressie?"

"Yes, Aunt Deborah."

"An' carried up the lamps?"

"Yes'm."

"An' put matches in the rooms?"

"Yes."

"Then fur's I can see everything's all right. You better come down now. What you settin' out in the shed for, Nathan? I should think you were three years old. You'll need to be goin' out to the gate to lend a hand with the trunks."

As with flushed face Deborah hurried across the grass, at her heels tagged the reluctant Nathan.

Tressie, however, lingered shyly in the hall.

Two persons alighted from the stage; at least there were two by actual count, but only one of them appeared to matter.

This was a stout, auburn-haired woman, fashionably dressed, who sailed forward under the momentum of a myriad of floating veils and scarfs. Powder and paint failed to conceal the inroads that age and many cycles of social warfare had wrought in her face, or soften the harshness of its lines. There was a pitilessness in the mouth, a sharpness in the eyes that might have characterized some beast of prey. She seemed a sort of modern Valkyrie whose Valhalla was society, and who if worsted in the fray of fashionable existence would wreak vengeance on all those who opposed her. The hat she wore was smart rather than artistic; her satin travelling-coat breathed affluence from every gleaming fold; and from her left hand, with idle effrontery, dangled a gold-mesh purse and an enamelled vanity-box.

Deborah regarded her with awe.

Had the princess of some heathen tribe suddenly descended upon her she could not have been more aghast.

Vainly she struggled to reconstruct her shattered preconceptions.

But before she succeeded her composure was for a second time routed.

She looked again with searching gaze to be sure her eyes had not deceived her.

No, it was true, bitterly true.

The stranger's right arm actually encircled a blinking Pomeranian!

Behind the elder woman, and bearing somewhat the relation to her that a row-boat might have borne to an ocean-liner, walked a girl, willowy and exquisitely gowned. A touch of the same rosy bloom that colored her mother's cheek tinted hers, and there was an unnatural perfection in the whiteness of her skin. The face, however, in spite of its artificiality, was not lacking in refinement, but was youthful, attractive, and good-humored. Beneath the jaunty little hat was tucked a mass of yellow hair, and the lifted eyes, blue as the bay itself, were just the necessary foil for its golden lustre.

It was perfectly evident that during the ride over from the Junction Caleb Trask, the driver, had told the visitors all there was to be told about the Harlows, for without hesitation Mrs. Mayhew approached Deborah and extending her hand said graciously, yet with a hint of condescension:

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Harlow. This is my daughter, Dora. Dora, my dear, Miss Harlow is our landlady, you know."

There was nothing, Deborah told herself, to re-

sent in the speech. She was their landlady. Nevertheless she did not at all enjoy being so cold-bloodedly termed such.

In the meantime Dora had put out a tiny gloved hand and greeted the older woman with girlish unaffectedness.

Instantly Deborah's mind registered the observation:

"The mother is unbearable, but of course Dora can't help that. She's more to be pitied than blamed, poor thing."

To her amusement Deborah found herself mentally giving the name the same drawling intonation with which the girl's mother pronounced it: "*D——ooo—ra.*"

It was evident Mrs. Mayhew had elected herself mistress of ceremonies for she now turned to Nate.

"And you are Captain Harlow, who is take us sailing," she continued with an increased cordiality of tone. (She was always more gracious to men than to women.) "He has a real look of the sea, hasn't he, Dora."

Nate flushed.

Nobody had ever called him Captain Harlow before, and the newly bestowed title disconcerted him; nor did it help matters to be told he had a look of the sea. He could not but speculate with disquietude as to what this peculiarity in his appearance might be.

Mrs. Mayhew, however, failed to notice his embarrassment, or if she did she paid no heed to it, for in the next breath she wheeled on Deborah and with unruffled poise inquired:

"And your niece?"

"Tressie? I thought she was here," answered Deborah blankly. "She must have slipped indoors. Tressie!"

"Such an odd name!" continued Mrs. Mayhew. "A contraction of Theresa, the stage-driver said. He told us she was about the age of my Dora. You must have felt bad not to have been able to give her greater educational advantages than she could enjoy in this little town. Dora has had a wonderful education. Perhaps she may be able to help your niece. The example of a cultured young woman can do so much."

"Oh, mother!"

The cry was prompted less by modesty than by a pained sense of the crudity of the remark.

It was Nate's hand on the girl's arm that arrested her.

He never could bear to see distress in others.

"That's all right, my dear," he said kindly. "We haven't been able to do for Tressie all we wish we might. Still, we ain't ashamed of her, nevertheless. In fact, I ain't at all sure but when you see her you'll feel we're even justified in bein' proud of her."

As he smiled into Dora's troubled eyes, and she flashed an answering smile into his, Tressie herself appeared in the doorway.

An exclamation, instantly checked, burst from Mrs. Mayhew's lips.

Standing there in the flood of the noonday sun the girl was the epitome of radiant beauty. There was no need to screen her from the light. The bronze of her hair caught its glory, imprisoning glints of gold amid its shining ripples. Nor could artifice have heightened the perfection of cheek or brow. The straightly chiselled nose; the lips parted into an expectant smile; the delicate hands and throat — not a point was lost on Mrs. Mayhew, a connoisseur long skilled in apprising at its worldly value every such asset. But with the realization that this humble creature's beauty far outdistanced that of her own daughter, the mother in the woman instantly arose in arms, prompting her to say with ill-concealed hauteur:

"I'm glad to see you, Tressie. This is my daughter, Miss Mayhew. No doubt you young people will meet occasionally during our stay and will, I hope, be on friendly terms."

But Dora stepped forward and impulsively clasped Tressie's hand.

"I hope we're going to meet very often," she declared cordially. "It will be great fun to have a girl of my own age to go about with."

Mrs. Mayhew regarded the scene disapprovingly. Her daughter's democracy and impulsiveness were very trying.

"Come, Dora!" she exclaimed, sharply interrupting the tableau. "We must be going in, my love."

Dora nodded, and with a parting pressure of Tressie's hand followed her mother into the house.

As Deborah preceded them up the stairs Nate and Caleb staggered behind with the great trunks. It was no easy matter to drag such mammoth luggage up the steep and narrow staircase.

Both men panted breathlessly.

"Somethin' like histin' a summer cottage up a step-ladder!" puffed Caleb. "What on earth can be in four chests of this size, do you s'pose? Why Lord, Nate, I could put all the stuff I own into one of 'em. Big as coffins, ain't they?"

Nate grunted.

He was too exhausted to speak.

The baggage, however, was at length deposited in the rooms; and then Mrs. Mayhew, closing her door, dropped wearily into a chair before the mirror.

"Wilton seems a beautiful spot, Dora," she began with studied carelessness. "And the Harlows are evidently very well-meaning persons indeed. In fact, that girl Tressie has quite a measure of good looks."

"A measure! Why, Mother, she is a perfect beauty."

"Yes, in a crude sense perhaps, my dear; a kind of peasant type — nothing very fine." She shrugged her shoulders. "Of course one can hardly look for refinement from a fishing ancestry."

"I think Tressie is a dear. They are nice people, all of them; one can easily see that."

"Now Dora, pray do not let us get into a controversy at the very outset. I am tired and do not feel able to argue. But my judgment in measuring people is usually to be relied upon. I have lived in the world much longer than you, my dear, and am far better fitted to gauge those who cross your path. The natives of such a town as this are doubtless simple, honest souls; thoroughly respectable, and well enough in their way. But they are hardly, you must own, our social equals. Be kind to this girl, certainly; I would not have you otherwise. But do not make yourself absurd by becoming intimate with her. Keep your distance, Dora; keep your distance. Remember who you are."

"Who am I?"

"What?"

"I say, who am I?"

There was a half-humorous, half-scornful inflection in the question.

"Dora, why will you misunderstand me so?"

With pained surprise the mother eyed her daughter. "Don't act so homely." (Occasionally when much agitated Mrs. Mayhew inadvertently lapsed into the vernacular of her youth.) "You know perfectly well what I mean. I am working only for your interest, my child, and trying conscientiously to guide you aright. Of course, if you choose to associate with common persons I can do no more than warn you. You are of age, and must decide your affairs for yourself. But I am your mother, and loving you as I do I cannot but feel sorry to see you blunder."

She pushed back her hair with a heavily ringed hand.

"When we decided to come to this place, you recollect, it was with no thought of mingling with its people. We merely wished to spend a summer in one of these quaint New England villages of which we had read so much. I want you to bear our purpose in mind. As for the natives — beyond the amusement they furnish us we care nothing for them, and the more strictly we maintain a mere business relation with them the better. That is all I shall say to you. If you elect to make them your bosom friends I cannot help it. Young people always consider themselves so wise. I suppose we older ones should learn to sit back and allow them to suffer from their own mistakes."

Rising, she moved toward the window.

Dora stood a moment pouting, then without reply, passed into her own room and closed the door.

In the meantime the kitchen was witnessing an equally stormy scene between Nate, Deborah, and Tressie.

"Of course I'll take up the hot water if you wish me to, Aunt Deborah," Tressie was saying, "but that does not alter the fact that I hate her. Patronizing us! The very idea! She isn't a lady — anybody can see that. No real lady would behave as she did."

"Tressie!"

"The miserable snob!"

Tears of indignation sparkled in the girl's eyes.

"Tressie!" repeated Deborah imploringly.

"Well, she is a snob; and if it weren't for Dora I'd never carry this pitcher of water to her room in the living world. Just because she has money she thinks she can —"

"Tressie dear," put in Nathan appealingly, "do hush! She might hear you."

"I wish she would. It might do her good."

But the wrath of the moment had found its vent in speech.

Tressie dimpled into one of her quick smiles.

"There, there, Uncle Nate; don't worry. I'll be gentle as a lamb. I'll even carry this boiling water up to her room and promise not to pour it all over

her. Goodness! Don't you wonder what Mrs. Minot will be like? Maybe we can set them one against another, Aunt Deborah."

With this parting shaft and a bewitching grimace, Tressie lifted the steaming pitcher and was gone.

## CHAPTER V

### A THUNDERBOLT

TRESSIE was not kept long in suspense regarding their other guests, for when at dusk the stage returned from the evening train it stopped at the gate and there deposited the remaining visitors.

Perhaps never in the simple lives of the Harlows had more disconcerting events been crowded into one day.

In addition to Mrs. Mayhew, who in herself presented problems enough to keep a corps of diplomats active, there was the dog *Frou-frou.*

"To think of my bein' obliged to put up with a dog!" Deborah had wailed. "Wretched little thing! It'll always be under foot, an' trackin' sand into the house. Well, Mrs. Mayhew will have to pay full board for it — that's all I've got to say. I 'spose it won't eat much. It ain't bigger'n a good sized rat. Still, the price will cover the wear an' tear on the furniture, an' it's no mor'n fair I should ask it. A dog sleepin' in my spare-room, an' a-lyin' on the bed Grandfather Dolliver died in! *A dog!* I never expected to witness such a sight long's I lived."

"I wouldn't be so upset, Aunt Deborah. I'd far rather have the dog than Mrs. Mayhew," smiled Tressie mischievously.

"Mebbe. Still, it's awful, ain't it?"

And now before poor Deborah had had time to adjust herself to these tragedies on their heels followed another so far outranking them that their importance was entirely overshadowed.

To Deborah, at least, the final blow that fell was the most menacing of the lot.

There was nothing to complain of in Mrs. Minot, a demure, sweet-faced woman with snowy hair primly parted in the centre of her forehead. It needed only a glimpse of the serene countenance to bring even to the Cape-bred woman's understanding that this was a lady — a person who had travelled much; mingled with varying strata of society; and learned to find in whomsoever she met something worthy both of respect and courtesy.

No, it was not Mrs. Minot who furnished the last straw to Deborah's already heavy burden.

But accompanying her!

This broad-shouldered young giant with athletic swing, who carried the satchels, umbrellas, and even a bag of golf-sticks as if they were feathers — could he be — he *must* be the son of whom the mother had written. Her *boy!*

He was not handsome, but he was wholesome to look upon, with clear-eyed, honest gaze; and a de-

termination in mouth and chin that augured ill for the obstacle that opposed him.

The first thought that flashed into Deborah's mind when she saw him was that she had given herself unnecessary uneasiness about the fruit-stains on the new napkins; the second to congratulate herself that now the model of Grandfather Dolliver's square-rigger might remain unmolested on the mantelpiece. But these petty considerations were swept entirely aside by the expression in the man's face when he first beheld Tressie.

He had been in the midst of a sentence when the girl rounded the corner of the house; and instantly the thread of his speech had snapped, and although he had made several confused attempts to regain it, like Humpty-Dumpty, he had been unable to put the fragments together again.

As for Tressie, she had blushed, faltered, and stood arrested against the great bush of honeysuckle, helpless as a child to conceal her amazement, timidity, and pleasure.

It was all the drama of a moment, for immediately Mrs. Minot had stepped forward and rescued the girl from her embarrassment by greeting her prettily, and introducing the two young people.

Then with crisp promptness Deborah had cut short further conversation by escorting Mrs. Minot upstairs, while Nate proceeded to follow her example by showing the man into the parlor bedroom.

Left alone Tressie paused in the cool of the night air — her cheeks burning, her pulse bounding. Then with swift step she disappeared into the kitchen to make the toast for supper.

"Norman Minot! Norman Minot!" she was repeating under her breath.

It was a beautiful name! And what a gentleman he was! Just such a man as she had always imagined a real gentleman would be. Probably he danced, and drove a car, and played tennis and golf, like that young Mr. Taylor from Chicago who had boarded one summer at the Junction. And what a nice hand he had — so strong, and white, and smooth; it was not at all like the hands of the Wilton fishermen; not in the least like the hand of Eddie Bearse, who sometimes walked home from church with her. And Mr. Minot's voice was so low and musical!

To think this paragon was actually to live for three months beneath the same roof that sheltered her; that she would see him every day — nay, many times a day; that she would speak to him; come to know him, perhaps, intimately!

She dimpled.

Only yesterday Wilton had been such a humdrum, monotonous town in which to pass one's days! And now, as if by magic, the place was suddenly transformed into the most interesting spot in the world.

As she sliced the bread Tressie's mercurial temperament, ever like a barometer, leaped upward and with joyous anticipation. Then the flight of her fancy wavered and plunged with lightning speed into an abyss of despair.

She had entirely forgotten Dora!

Dora would be dwelling beneath the same roof, too; and, furthermore, she was not only an extremely pretty girl, but in addition was much more a part of the world of a man like Norman Minot than was Tressie herself. Doubtless Dora also danced, drove a car, played tennis and golf; and beside this she had, of course, visited all the places in Europe to which, without question, Mr. Minot must have travelled. A hundred interests would link them into comradeship; the very language they spoke would be the same. With a girl like Dora Mayhew at his elbow what notice would Norman Minot take of her? Why, Dora would have nothing else to do but to be entertaining; while for herself there were lamps and pitchers to fill, dishes to wash, beds to make, and her aunt to wait upon.

A slam of the door shattered her web of fantasie, and Deborah burst into the room.

"Tressie, your toast's burnin'! It's black as a coal already. I should think you'd 'a' seen 'twas charred to a cinder. I could smell it way upstairs. Why couldn't you have watched it, an' not gone

into one of your moonin' spells? Just see all the bread you've wasted!"

She advanced impatiently.

"Here, give me the toaster. You're no more to be relied upon than a two-months'-old baby! I did think you could be trusted to help get supper without spoilin' all the food."

"I'm so sorry, Aunt Deborah!"

Deborah shook her head.

"You're always bein' sorry when it's too late to mend matters. I'd oughter learned by this time to do things myself. Anybody'd think with all I've been through today you might have helped me a little, if you never did it again."

In humiliated silence Tressie surrendered the toasting-fork.

"You'd better go up an' wash your hands, an' put on your clean apron now. Supper's 'most ready."

"I'm sorry about the toast, Aunt Deborah," repeated the girl. "I did mean to help."

"I 'spose you did," sighed Deborah, "but somehow you never seem to succeed in doin' it. There, run along. It warn't but a couple of slices, anyway. While you're up there you better stop at Mrs. Mayhew's door an' see if she wants anything; she said somethin' about havin' her collar hooked up."

"Can't her daughter do it?"

"She didn't seem to think she could. She said they were used to havin' a maid at home."

"Well, I shan't be lady's-maid to anybody," declared Tressie, bridling instantly. "Where does she think she is? If she is coming to board on Cape Cod she needn't expect to find lady's-maids thrown in. The disagreeable old —"

"Now Tressie, for goodness' sake don't go off in another of those harangues! I'm at the end of my rope, an' simply haven't the patience to stand it. If you can't do your part in the kitchen you must do it somewhere else. You or I have got to hook that harridan up; your uncle can't."

"I'll go, Aunt Deborah," cried Tressie, catching delightedly at the word. "She is a harridan, isn't she?"

At the triumph in the tone Deborah frowned.

"I didn't mean to call her that," she explained repentantly. "It slipped right out. That shows how careful we'd oughter be about thinkin' evil."

"I don't see what harm it does."

"'Tain't Christian. You see how it leads you on."

She bent to turn the toast.

A trifle abashed, Tressie lingered.

"Isn't Mrs. Minot a dear, Aunt Deborah?" she ventured.

"Mrs. Minot? Yes, she seems to be a very estimable woman," came stiffly from Deborah.

"And Mr. Minot is such a gentleman!"

"Mebbe. I ain't got much use for men. They ain't one of 'em to be trusted round the corner. I know more 'bout 'em than you do, an' my opinion is that the less we women have to do with 'em the better."

"But Mr. Minot is—"

"You don't know what he is. He may be all well 'nough; then again he may not be. These city men live dretful lives, 'cordin' to all accounts—dretful. It's likely, though, you won't see much of him 'cept when you're waitin' on table; an' 'twill be just as well, too."

Tressie's bright face clouded, and turning she moved slowly toward the door.

When her hand was once upon the knob, however, she stopped and glancing demurely over her shoulder remarked:

"After all, though, Aunt Deborah, bad as men are we mustn't forget that all the angels mentioned in the Bible were men; Michael, Gabriel, Lucifer, and the four-and-twenty elders. Nothing is said about any women angels."

Deborah scrutinized her niece as she often did when she was puzzled to understand whether or not she was being laughed at. But the face confronting her was entirely serious.

"Probably the men blew their trumpets the loudest an' so got noticed," she said solemnly.

"There must, of course, have been a host of women angels round who were just quietly harpin' on their harps — an' likely they were makin' most of the music, too; but because they kept in the background nobody so much as knew their names, so they got left out of the Scriptures altogether. Just this world right over again, you see! The roosters do the crowin', an' the hens do all the work. Still, that doesn't for one minute prove that the men are any better. Remember, it's the worst sinners that make the most noise repentin'."

There was a musical suggestion of laughter in the room.

Nevertheless when Deborah glanced sharply at Tressie the girl's countenance was as earnest as that of a youthful novice gazing with veneration at her Mother Superior.

After the door had closed Deborah lifted the toaster.

The reflection from the fire lighted to scarlet her face, throwing into relief its network of anxious wrinkles.

"Much of a proposition as these boarders are goin' to be, managin' 'em won't be a patch on reinin' in Tressie," she murmured. "I'm goin' to have my hands full to keep that girl from scratchin' Mrs. Mayhew's eyes out, an' wringin' the neck of her dog; to say nothin' of preventin' her fallin' in love with this Mr. Minot. If I'd known it I would

no more 'a' had a man in the house than I'd cut off my right hand.

"Tressie ain't ever seen men, an' knowin' nothin' about 'em she goes to worshipin' 'em as if they were a lot of marble images. There's no convincin' her they ain't saints straight out of heaven. But they can't fool me," declared Deborah with spirit. "Not much they don't; most of 'em know it, too; an' they ain't goin' to fool Tressie, either, if I can help it. Who'd 'a' dreamed that takin' four boarders would 'a' stirred up such a rumpus?"

## CHAPTER VI

### LIFE'S INJUSTICES

WHEN Tressie, flushing crimson, entered the dining-room that evening carrying a large tray of dishes, Norman Minot instantly sprang to meet her.

"Let me take it for you," he exclaimed.

"No, thank you; no, indeed!" Tressie protested.

"But it is so heavy."

"My dear Mr. Minot," interrupted Mrs. Mayhew, "there is not the slightest need for you to concern yourself, Tressie expects to serve us."

"Yes," nodded the girl, her cheeks blazing, "I'm to wait on you every day; so please sit down. It only makes it — harder." She breathed the final word so low that it could scarcely be heard.

"You see, son, Miss Tressie not only welcomes us to her home, but adds to her hospitality the graciousness of looking out for us herself," his mother explained gently. "I am sure we should all appreciate her thought for our comfort."

As Tressie flashed the speaker a glance of gratitude the man loosened his hold on the tray, but not

before he had guided it safely to the little stand nearby.

"There are times when chivalry must give place to necessity, Mr. Minot," observed Mrs. Mayhew blandly. Then in an undertone she murmured to Mrs. Minot: "So gallant of your son, Mrs. Minot. I see you have brought him up with the proper ideals."

"It is many years since I have presumed to frame ideals for Norman," replied the Boston woman simply. "He is a man now, and formulates his own."

There was, however, pride in her eyes as she glanced at her boy.

"Of course," agreed Mrs. Mayhew. "Such a wise plan, too. It is on that same principle that I have brought up Dora. What a responsibility it is, the bringing up of children! Tressie, I believe I will have a bit more of the fish. Delicious, isn't it? I suppose in a little place like this the people know more about the catching and cooking of fish than they know about almost anything else."

Norman Minot saw Tressie start and color.

He cringed as if the thrust had been aimed at him.

Both he and his mother possessed that innate courtesy that shrinks from witnessing discomfort in another. He would have given almost anything at the moment to be able to readjust the situation,

and relieve the girl of the embarrassment of her present position. Since, however, he was powerless to help her he devoured his food with nervous haste, and hailed with pleasure his mother's suggestion that they go out and watch the moonrise.

With alacrity Mrs. Mayhew caught up the proposal.

"Moonrise?" she reiterated. "How delightful! I did not know there was a moon tonight. It will be wonderful to see it come up out of the water, won't it, Dora? Mr. Minot, you take Dora with you and your mother, and I will follow. We older ones must move more slowly."

Thus forced to precede their elders Norman Minot and Dora stepped out into the soft evening air.

Before them lay an immensity of blackness from which the music of the surf came like the sobbing of a child in a troubled dream. The night was very still and for a long time they stood listening. Then suddenly a ray of yellow shot across the waves gilding their heaving crests to glistening splendor, and lighting the vast breathing deep into a flood of glory. Slowly, majestically from the horizon a disc of gold rose. Like a mighty searchlight its glade lengthened until it stretched, a path of radiance, across the moving waters.

Norman Minot and his companion watched the miracle in silence.

Against its shining background their figures stood out clear cut as silhouettes.

"What a magnificently built fellow your son is, Mrs. Minot," remarked Mrs. Mayhew. "I did not realize he was such a Hercules."

"He is a large man. Sometimes I can hardly believe he is my son."

"He must be athletic."

"Yes, he is devoted to almost every out-of-door sport. In college he went in for jumping and his nickname, 'The Hurdler,' has clung to him ever since. I fear I am very foolish about Norman," she added apologetically. "You see, he is all I have."

"I know. We mothers do get so wrapped up in our children," purred Mrs. Mayhew. "I am just so about Dora. We are inseparable; like two girls, in fact — positively like two girls!"

Nevertheless in the days that followed this inseparability did not appear to be of paramount consideration, for in whatever direction Norman Minot set forth he was implored by Mrs. Mayhew to take Dora with him.

"Are you going to the village, Mr. Minot?" the fond parent would ask. "Do let Dora go with you. She is pining for a walk, poor child." Or: "I see Mr. Minot, you are starting for the beach with your book. Dora would so enjoy going with you! She is quite mad about tramping on the shore."

What could one say?

Were Dora the most unattractive of girls a man could not with politeness refuse such requests, and Dora was far from being unattractive. She was, on the contrary, decidedly pretty; and to this prettiness, which was of a striking although conventional type, was added the enhancing accessory of an apparently unlimited wardrobe, the decorative value of which not only on the landscape but on Dora herself was not inconsiderable. She was, moreover, rich in light, fluffy chatter — the accepted jargon of the society girl of her years; and she was either blessed with a most adaptable disposition, or was so totally lacking in initiative, that she hailed with equal favor any plan suggested. A native generosity and kindness of heart, as well as a good education, had saved her from the crudities of her mother, and rendered her amazingly unspoiled, when one considered the superficial atmosphere in which she had been reared.

Her parents had come from the middle West, where Mr. Mayhew — a successful manufacturer — had amassed a fortune; and where, evidently, feeling that he had then performed his whole duty toward an ambitious wife, he had afterward passed away. To Mrs. Mayhew, born of farming ancestry, a fortune was a novel and fearsome possession that brought in its train an overwhelming sense of obligation; not at all her obligation toward others, but

rather their obligation toward her. The thought that as mistress of a million much was due her, was seldom absent from her mind. Privately, however, she was shrewd enough to realize that she had many things to learn before she could with perfect ease move naturally in her recently acquired sphere. She, therefore, constantly studied and aped the bearing of those born to the purple, and to whom wealth and all it brought had been the heritage of generations. Long since she had secretly acknowledged that she herself could never hope to be anything but an imitator, and she tried to be as faithful a copyist as she was able.

But with Dora it was different.

All that the mother might never be, the daughter might yet become.

Fortunately the girl had beauty which with care would stand her in good stead. Moreover there was no plebeian past for her to live down. Since childhood she had been accustomed to luxury and accepted it without self-consciousness. Mrs. Mayhew exulted that Dora, at least, had always known the ripple of silken skirts, the scent of expensive perfumes, the gleam of manicured finger-tips. And now that the girl was grown and educated the great purpose agitating the elder woman was to arrange a brilliant marriage for her offspring. It was time, before Dora began to show fatigue, and before her youth faded, that she should capture an establish-

ment and build up for the family a social position.

As to just what type of husband should be chosen Mrs. Mayhew was still undecided. Money was not a necessity; there was money enough already. But if the girl could secure genius or family, some of the assets which would admit her to an inner circle where mere money was not the open sesame, it would be highly desirable. To such a holy-of-holies Mrs. Mayhew herself had never been able to gain entrance, although she had tried to do so by every means in her power.

There were persons whom she would have given much to have claimed as friends — persons with not a tithe of her wealth, who passed her by. What they had that rendered them her superiors she could not have defined, but inwardly she bowed the knee before them. Afar off she could recognize the type. Of such a genus were Mrs. Minot and her son Norman. Generations of culture had gone into their making; it was no veneer that glossed over a foundation of imperfections, but a basic fineness of fibre-rooted at the heart of the stock itself. Although Mrs. Mayhew would have scorned to wear the plain and out-of-date gowns in which Mrs. Minot was constantly seen, the folds into which those simple garments fell baffled her power of reproduction. It seemed as if the silks had hung for so many hundreds of years in those perfect plaits that they now arranged themselves artistically from

sheer heredity. Then there were the cameos with their thin gold settings, and the bits of exquisite lace; these, too, had ancestry. Mrs. Mayhew had laces far richer; but when she put them on she failed to obtain from them that same satisfying result. Should she have fastened at her throat the small, almost threadbare jabot Mrs. Minot wore at supper, she would have looked ridiculous. Yet upon this Boston-bred woman the fragment of rose-point was not only suitable but quite perfect.

And the boy had the same intangible characteristics. He would, one felt, have been at home among kings; and it was even a matter of speculation in Mrs. Mayhew's mind whether, were the facts to be known, he might not actually have dined unabashed in such company. But if so, he never mentioned it. He spoke neither of his friends, his life, nor the countries he had visited. Instead, with complete simplicity he took his place amid present conditions, and whether such humble surroundings were the result of necessity or of choice she had no means of determining.

The Minots, she argued, might be curtailing. Many aristocratic families did curtail. Or, on the other hand, they might be well able to summer in a more costly environment and preferred this provincial fishing life as a foil for a strenuous social winter. She could fancy them following either course. With such persons, anything was possible. Cer-

tain it was, however, that no matter what the whim they elected to pursue they were a family well worth cultivating, and it was a fortunate chance that had thrown her into this intimate relation with them. Even should it prove only an entering wedge into a social order she might otherwise never have approached, the summer would be profitably spent in driving it, and should worse come to worse, and no headway be gained, the Minots would be useful examples, if nothing more, and as such would even be worth weeks of sunburn and frontier diet.

Therefore she urged Dora to cultivate Mr. Minot while she herself pursued his mother with equal persistency. Instead of sitting lazily about reading a novel as would have been her preference under ordinary conditions, Mrs. Mayhew tramped the beach, enduring the combined discomforts of deep sand and high-heeled pumps, and watching the merciless salt winds blow her complexion out to sea. She battled, too, with the surf, and even in the mildly tempered water turned blue when she went in, and purple when she came out.

"And just as soon as we get used to these horrors, Dora, we've got to begin sailing in that boat," she declared resolutely. "I've hired that *Sylph* for a month and we've not been in her yet; there's not the slightest sense in paying for *Sylphs* we don't use. The thing is eating its head off already. By next week we must take the plunge, and make a

business of sailing every day so we can get used to it. Yachting is one of the fashionable sports, and we must master it. After we've got to look as if we were perfectly at home on a boat, we can invite the Minots to go with us. The more you see of Mr. Minot the better; he is a possibility."

"I do wish, Mother, you would not view every man I meet in the light of a future husband," complained Dora peevishly.

"How silly you are! How should I view men, pray? You don't want to be an old maid, do you?"

"But you so obviously fling me at Mr. Minot's head! I should think he would hate the very sight of me," protested Dora indignantly.

Her mother assumed an injured air.

"I suppose no parent ever receives gratitude from a child," she replied. "Flinging you at his head! Do you realize, Dora, that if mothers did not manage their daughters' affairs there would not be half the matches made that there are? It is a mother's business to adjust, to guide, and to — well, manipulate situations. Do you for one moment imagine that the lucky coups made by our American girls were the work of chance?"

"But Mr. Minot may not like me."

"Nonsense! A young, impressionable man doesn't know what he likes. He has to be helped."

With this belief as a creed, Mrs. Mayhew pro-

ceeded to help Norman Minot to such extent as she deemed prudent and necessary.

From the little window over the kitchen sink Tressie daily beheld him and Dora tramp gaily down the harbor road and across the dunes. Forenoon, afternoon, and evening they were constantly in one another's company. Under such conditions it was not easy to sustain one's enthusiasm for filling lamps and washing dishes.

The workings of the Eternal Mind have puzzled many a sage older and wiser than Tressie, who was young both in philosophy and in faith.

Why should some persons be born to pleasure and leisure while others drudged for them, she questioned. And why should one woman's lot fall amid the shifting fascinations of a city environment, while another's was walled in by the limitations of a petty and cramped existence?

Where was the justice in such a dispensation?

She had as much right as Dora Mayhew to youth and happiness; nay, given equal opportunity, she would not fear to match intellects with this favorite of Fortune.

Hot tears rushed unbidden to Tressie's eyes. Nor did it mend matters to have Deborah remark:

"I declare if Mr. Minot ain't all took up with that Miss Mayhew! He can't seem to bear her out of his sight. They're goin' over to Belleport this afternoon to play golf."

## CHAPTER VII

### SAILING AS AN EDUCATION

TRUE to her word the following week Mrs. Mayhew, who because of her inland birth, had never had any experience with boats, began her nautical education.

One breathlessly hot morning she greeted Nate with the words:

"Today, Captain Harlow, my daughter and I have decided to go sailing."

Nate scrutinized the speaker, amusement in his eye.

"Bless my soul, marm, you couldn't go sailin' today, no way in the world."

"Why not?"

"There ain't a mite of breeze; not enough to hist a pocket-handkerchief in."

"Oh!"

Mrs. Mayhew was obviously disappointed.

"I am sorry," she said. "We must try it tomorrow, then."

"I'm afraid so."

The morrow came.

"Too bad, marm, but there'll be no sailin' today, either," Nate declared, greeting her just after breakfast. "The wind's blowin' a gale. You'd be drenched to the skin if you was to go out."

The third day was no better; it was still blowing.

"I could take you out, marm, an' I will if you say the word; but I wouldn't advise it. You'd get dretful wet."

"That is just what you said yesterday. What do you mean? Is anything the matter with your boat? Isn't it tight?" inquired Mrs. Mayhew, puzzled.

"Tight!"

"Yes. Because if it is a leaky boat, you should have told us in the first place."

"Mercy, no! 'Tain't leaky," gasped Nate. "I mean the water'll come over the sides."

"Over the sides!" repeated Mrs. Mayhew in consternation. "Aren't the sides built high enough to keep the water out? If not, it must be a very poor boat."

"It ain't a poor boat," retorted Nathan, resentment sharpening his tone, "What I mean is the waves are so high they'd break over her. Still, if you want to go, I'll take you gladly. I never mind gettin' wet myself."

"Perhaps we better wait until tomorrow."

The morrow came.

A light breeze was blowing and the tide was running in.

"Not much of a day for goin' out," observed Nate when Mrs. Mayhew, armed for the cruise, confronted him on the lawn. "It does beat all, don't it? We'll try it, though, if you say so."

"The weather never appears quite to suit you, Captain Harlow," came sarcastically from the lady. "I'm afraid if we wait until you get the ideal conditions, we shall never go at all. It seems to me we better make the best of today."

"All right, marm. Goodness knows, I'm only too pleased to go," declared Nate cordially. "I only just wanted you to see the *Sylph* at her best, an' this is no day for showin' her off, an' puttin' her through her paces."

The trip, however, was not a satisfactory one.

It was necessary to tack, and every time Mrs. Mayhew got herself, and Frou-frou, and Dora comfortable, a complete shifting of positions was imperative. This inconvenience Mrs. Mayhew bore in silence, but it was evident that she did not like it. She was, however, a creature of indomitable resolution, and in consequence, when they reached the float, she affirmed with stateliness:

"Tomorrow, Captain Harlow, we will go again."

But the next day it blew once more.

Nate sighed.

"I never did see such a spell of weather, marm;

never in all my born days!" he remarked apologetically when the two intrepid sailors appeared in the kitchen doorway. "You're foolish to try it this mornin'. It ain't no day to sail."

"We prefer to go, nevertheless," came icily from the elder woman.

They went.

Nate put two reefs in the sail and clung to the lee of the shore; but Mrs. Mayhew felt dizzy, Dora was pale, and they did not stay out long.

"This sailing is more difficult to accustom one's self to than I had imagined," asserted Mrs. Mayhew from the bed, when she and her daughter were once more safe within the shelter of their rooms. "Especially with a captain like this Harlow person, who puts every possible obstacle in one's way. I am just beginning to fathom that man, Dora."

"What do you mean, Mamma?"

Dora, too, was lying on the bed and her eyes, which peered large and blue from her pallid face, now opened so that they were even larger and bluer than ever.

"Don't you read him at all?"

"Read him? No."

"Well, I do." There was triumph in the words. "When I first met the man I, too, took him to be an honest, artless soul — possibly without much brain, but still a creature to be trusted. But I see now I was mistaken — very much mistaken."

"How?"

"He is not artless at all, my dear. On the contrary he is a clever schemer who means to take all the money he can get and do as little in return for it as possible."

"I don't understand."

"You wouldn't. You do not know as much about people as I do, Dora. Can't you see that all these excuses he has been making about the weather were just a ruse? He simply did not intend to take that boat out any oftener than he had to, and therefore he invented every sort of reason to put us off so we wouldn't go."

Dora sat up and regarded her mother with astonishment.

"Yes," continued the Western woman impressively, "I see it all now. The first day there was no wind; the next there was too much wind; and don't you remember how on the third day he objected that there was only a light breeze? Then when he discovered I was too clever to be put off, he racked his brain to invent an obstacle, and he made the trip as uncomfortable as he could in the hope of discouraging us. You recall how he kept moving the sail from one side of the boat to the other, and asking us to change our seats all the time. He just did that to be disagreeable. I did not realize it at the time, but I do now."

"You don't really think so, Mother."

"I certainly do. Then what followed? He took us out today and left most of the sail tied up. I suppose he was too lazy to undo it, and he thought we would not know the difference. He may have calculated he could save that much wear and tear on the canvas. Oh, the man is a very artful person; very!"

"Why, Mother, I can't believe it of him."

Dora looked sceptical.

Nevertheless the evidence was unsettling.

"I have held my peace," went on her mother, "until I should be thoroughly convinced. Now, there is no further doubt in my mind. I have proofs, and I am going to show that crafty rascal that I see through his game, and am not to be fooled so easily. We will go sailing every day from now on, let him say what he pleases; moreover we'll sail just where we wish — not where he elects to take us."

In accordance with this theory Mrs. Mayhew met the amazed Nate the next morning with the chill mandate:

"My daughter and I are ready for our sail, Captain Harlow."

"I dunno 'bout the weather," returned the innocent Nathan. "I ain't had a look at the vane yet."

"The weather has nothing whatsoever to do with the case," came majestically from the Westerner.

She might have been a queen ordering the massacre of a million subjects, so uncompromising was her tone.

Without waiting for a reply she moved off toward the shore with the timid Dora in her wake.

No sooner had Nate overtaken them at the float than she began issuing additional orders.

"We'll go up that creek, Captain Harlow, so that we may get a closer view of those houses along the bay."

"But you can't, marm."

"Can't!"

"No. You see the tide—"

"The tide is immaterial. Isn't there always a tide?"

"But it's runnin' out."

"It is nothing to us which way it is running," was the severe retort. "It is usually flowing one way or the other, I presume."

"But when it's runnin' out—"

"We won't argue the matter. I've told you we wished to go along under that bank."

"Couldn't do it, no way in the world, marm," answered Nate. "Let alone the tide, there ain't a mite of breeze in the lee of that bluff."

"Breeze! There's a great deal of breeze," protested the indignant guest.

"Oh, there's breeze here," explained Nate good-humoredly, "but there's none over there."

"How do you know? Have you been over to see? It is all very well for you to stand here and say there is no breeze along that shore. I don't believe a word of it. If you have a boat that won't go where you want it to, you should have told me before we hired it. What is a boat for except to go places in?" As her wrath rose her eloquence increased. "We'll get into the boat and find out whether there is a breeze over there or not. And I wish to tell you right now that I do not propose to go in that criss-cross fashion you sailed in the other day. It was extremely annoying and inconvenient. Nor need you keep most of the sail rolled up. We'll undo it, if you please, even if it does put you to some trouble to roll it up again. We are compensating you amply for your work, I think, so you have no cause to complain."

Nate was too dumbfounded to speak.

"I do not wish ever to discuss sailing conditions with you again," concluded Mrs. Mayhew with regal dignity. "When I say *Sail,* we'll sail!"

"Very well, marm."

Unfortunately for the lady she said *Sail* that very afternoon, evidently feeling that there was no time like the present to drive home her point.

In the meantime a crisp breeze had sprung up which had lashed the bay into a cream of whitecaps.

But Dora's mother was not to be deterred.

"We shall be ready at two o'clock, Captain," she said curtly.

A light, half angry, half humorous, flickered in Nate's eyes.

"Very well, marm."

"You see, Dora," whispered her mother, "I was quite right in my summary of Captain Harlow. The man is meek as a lamb now that he understands I have found him out. You notice he doesn't do any more grumbling about the weather."

It might, alas, have been better for Mrs. Mayhew if he had.

But every creature will turn occasionally, and Nate was human.

Promptly at two o'clock, he bundled Mrs. Mayhew and her daughter into the *Sylph* and, letting out every inch of canvas, steered for the Channel.

Great combers of glassy green lifted the yawl like a chip high on their peaks; then buried her in the troughs between their foaming summits where she tossed, a thing cut off from the world. Up and down, up and down she went! As she braved the billows, the flying spume drenched the mariners to the skin. The sail bellied; the mast strained; the craft heeled in the wind until her keel was almost out of water.

Mrs. Mayhew clasped Dora, and in an agony of fear sank to the bottom of the boat. Bereft of paint

and powder she was a pitiful sight, a mere sodden mass of humanity.

"Head for the shore, Captain," she cried in a frenzy of fear. "Land us safely and you shall have a hundred dollars — more if you demand it, more! To think we should journey miles to visit the coast only to lose our lives here! If we ever reach the land I shall never step foot in another boat, nor let Dora. You may have your money and your boat, too. Just bring me and my fatherless child to shore and I will bless you to the end of my days!"

"I'll land you all right," returned Nate soothingly. "Don't give yourself no uneasiness 'bout that, marm."

And he did.

With consummate skill he brought the *Sylph* through the breakers, anchoring her without mishap at her own moorings.

For a good skipper there had not been one moment of real danger, although there had been much discomfort.

Once upon land, Mrs. Mayhew could not say enough in praise of his prowess. "Such a wonderful captain, my dear Mr. Minot! The man is a positive marvel! By rights he should be on the bridge of an ocean liner instead of sailing a small boat like this one. And moreover, what do you suppose? When I offered him a clean hundred-

dollar bill for saving our lives *he refused it* — and he is not rich, either! There is something so self-respecting about these Cape people."

She paused.

"But the experience we have had is an unforgetable one. I am still all of a tremble. Nothing could induce me to go out on the water again, nor shall I allow Dora to."

"Perhaps, then, you would be willing to waive your claims to the *Sylph* and let Norman have the boat," proposed Mrs. Minot quickly. "He has been very eager to rent one and thus far has been unable to do so."

"By all means! He is welcome to the boat so far as we are concerned," cried Mrs. Mayhew. "Only do pray him to be careful. Sailing is such a treacherous sport!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### NORMAN MINOT

NORMAN MINOT was only too glad to profit by the Mayhews' decision that for them, at least, there should be "no more sea." Yachting was not only one of his favorite pastimes, but the good luck came just at a moment when he was becoming restive under the too constant society of women. He was not at all of the type characterized as a man's man. On the contrary he admired women, and through the comradeship of a rarely gifted mother had become quite an expert in feminine psychology. There was a mental exhilaration in the repartee of a brilliant woman which was like gymnastics to his lawyer's wit; nor did he so lack the human element that he scorned the diversion of a mild flirtation with an attractive girl. Nevertheless because he was every inch a well rounded masculine being he delighted in manly sports and in contact with those of his own sex.

At college he had been one of the most popular fellows in his class, and to the present day this reputation had followed him, for he never failed o

a cordial welcome whenever he chose to poke his head in at his clubs. Men liked Norman Minot. They had proved him to be a loyal friend; a man of standards, yet a good sport; a chum to be respected, trusted, and appealed to in time of stress. Although obviously born to the rank of leader his athletic training had early inculcated into him the virtue also of being able to co-operate, and play well his part on a team. On the other hand when he ruled it was with his mother's tact and graciousness, and always with the consent of the governed. With his father's keen mind and unconquerable persistence added to these qualities what marvel that he had a justifiable faith in his star?

Mr. Minot senior had been rated in financial circles as a man of generous fortune, although to what figures his wealth mounted no one exactly knew. He was a democratic person — that is, as democratic as a born aristocrat could be. The poise of his head, the cast of his features, his ancestry of old Massachusetts stock were, of course, phenomena beyond his control; but his mode of living, and his relation with other men, were matters well within his choosing. He never boasted a carriage, but walked with erect stride wherever he ordained to go. Furthermore the home into whose fellowship he welcomed the thinkers of his time — statesmen, preachers, writers, and men of affairs, was far simpler than was many another

dwelling dependent on a much more limited bank account. The paintings he purchased were few but fine, and the grain of his mahogany gleamed flawless beneath its polish. He was never too superior to mingle with all classes of society, and any door he chose to enter was always thrown wide open to greet his coming.

Descended as he was from the *Mayflower* forbears he maintained until his death, both in his public and private life, the Puritan ideals handed down to him by his Plymouth Rock ancestors. For many of his contemporaries Time's touch had modified these standards, rendering them more elastic that they might meet the exigencies of the day; but Thomas Minot never consented to remodel the heritage of his fathers. What was honorable in 1620 he held to be honorable still; and what would then have been ranked as dishonest, he argued, had gained no virtue with the centuries. A thing was either right or it was wrong; there was no middle code.

While a successful merchant in the twenties he had married a woman with a background similar to his own. Together their progenitors had fled to the New World in search of religious freedom, and shoulder to shoulder their sons had borne an honored share in the liberty building of the nation. Some had fallen at Lexington and Concord; others had witnessed the Boston Massacre and, having

lived through the turbulent days of early New England, had taken up their dwellings under the shadow of the golden dome capping Beacon Hill there to labor for the welfare of their country, their state, their city. When in the course of time to the son and daughter of this illustrious race a man-child had been born their united purpose was that he should be reared to do honor to the ancestry from which he was sprung.

Thomas Minot lived only long enough to lay the cornerstone of his son's life; then the structure of the child's character was left in the mother's hands. Faithfully she upheld her husband's standards. All that education could do, all that travel could accomplish she gave to her boy; but from his father's austerity of principle, and simplicity of life, she never unbent. Changes swept on about her. The city in which she and her fathers had lived became the prey of those less high of purpose; on every hand she beheld the native-born out-numbered and thrust aside by the newer comer, and the statesman ousted by the politician. Nevertheless stubbornly she clung to the fundamentals with which her kindred had leavened the nation, and to which these later arrivals owed the ideals of the land of their adoption. The creed that her country furnish a refuge for the oppressed was very difficult to witness when put into wholesale operation; and many a time she sighed for the days that had

vanished, and prayed for a deeper faith in the all-wise Power that guided and guarded the destinies of her beloved country.

Had she not been a woman whose force of character and inflexibility of purpose were tempered by a vein of humor she might have been a pedant; as it was, however, her capacity for enjoying the comedy as well as the tragedy of existence preserved her balance, and endowed her with an eternal youthfulness of heart very charming to encounter in a woman of her type. Yet even she had her limitations. The idiosyncrasies of the city that had given birth to her and to her fathers escaped her astuteness. Often her son was wont to insist fondly that this single fault rendered her the dearer since without it she would have been almost too perfect to be human. Perhaps it was because she venerated the traditions of Boston until they became not customs but rites that her sense of perspective regarding them was lost. One does not jest about one's religion.

Still did the family homestead on Beacon Hill boast its jangling doorbell, its purple window-glass, its Chippendale furniture, its Paul Revere silver. Still did the New England dish of smoking beans and brown-bread grace the mahogany each Saturday night, and give place to the fishball on Sunday morning. The *Transcript* and *Atlantic Monthly* never went unread, nor were the squirrels

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on the Common allowed to go hungry. As for the Public Garden, a bit of paper littering it was a matter of personal concern; and the clipping of a shrub, the cutting of a tree, a cause for instant investigation. Nevertheless Mrs. Minot was quite as independent and democratic as her husband had been. If she chose to wear her close, not-to-be-dated bonnet season after season, and travel to and from the Symphony concerts in the little yellow car that bobbed its way through the West End, she at least never failed to mail her cheque to her regular charities, nor do her part in the Fatherless and Widow Society. Each season, too, she and the same group of women who for years had sewed together, met one morning a week and fashioned an ever-increasing pyramid of flannel skirts for the poor, although that worthy and durable garment had long since given way to more frivolous lingerie.

Progress, as regarded clothing, did not interest Mrs. Minot. She bought her things where she had always bought them, at a shop where the wings of fashion were clipped that they might not soar to a height that caused one to become ridiculous. Here and nowhere else could she unfailingly purchase those high-necked, long-sleeved garments with fine enduring edgings, whose pattern, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, changed not.

As for her lot in Mount Auburn, her pew in King's Chapel, her share in the Athenaeum, she

would have sacrificed almost everything else before parting with these cherished inheritances.

It was from such parentage as this that Norman Minot was descended; and with a sense of his obligation to the past strong within him, he set forth to make still another generation of Minots respected. He was the last of his name, and within his hands rested the perpetuation or destruction of the building of six generations of purposeful men and women. There had never been a blot on the family escutcheon. Every character that had preceded him in the great drama had played a conscientious part in the evolution that now set him, Norman Minot, in Boston to confront the problems of the twentieth century. He must make no misstep but must continue the line, and hand down unsullied to his successors the sacred treasures given into his keeping.

Never had any Minot before him been blessed with the opportunities that now were his. Education had advanced, science had progressed, life had broadened; his country was now no longer an isolated factor but an international power in the universe of nations. Unbounded vistas of learning, travel, service, stretched before him on every hand. It would not be enough that he do as well as had his ancestors; he must do better.

Fortunately he was a normal being and therefore did not permit the sense of his responsibilities to

flatten him into morbidness. With the simple prayer that he might live worthily he went forth, like an old-time knight with untarnished shield, to hew for himself an honorable career. He surpassed his father's college record by graduating with a *cum laude,* and afterward spent four years of study in foreign universities. In the meantime throughout the windings of his educational pathway his mother, herself a scholar, followed — or rather walked with him hand in hand. They wintered at Zurich, summered at Geneva, loitered at Paris; always living modestly that their money might be spent for essentials rather than non-essentials. All that the Old World had to offer in art, music, scenery, history, they seized eagerly upon.

Returning to America after this sojourn Norman chose the law as his profession, and on graduating was invited into the offices of a firm whose senior partner had been a college classmate of his father. This old gentleman whose name sparkled with more lustre for past success than present-day achievements and who knew well the stock from which the boy was sprung, saw to it that every chance for advancement was put in the younger man's way. These openings Norman grasped with alacrity. He was a tireless worker who needed only a favoring breeze in which to launch away. With delight his shrewd benefactor watched him. In the am-

bitious, unwearying youth he seemed in fancy to see himself once again at the threshold of life. The lad had all the energy, all the fire he had once possessed. Now, alas, that energy was spent, and the fire burned out. He was an old man! Yet God willing, there was still time to train in his place another who should one day represent him, and carry forward to an honored place in history an eminent and brilliant race of jurists.

With this end in view the elder man fostered the unfolding genius of the younger; and when in the fullness of time the kindly old friend was no more and Norman Minot was taken into the firm, it was only to realize more poignantly than ever his obligations toward the man who had sponsored him. Of the triumph at reaching this success so early in his career he at first realized little. Had not the prize been captured at the cost of the life of one he both reverenced and loved; one who had been a second father to him? Little by little, however, this wound healed, and Norman began to appreciate his great good-fortune. At thirty-five he stood where many a man of twice his age would have been proud to stand. His heart beat with justifiable satisfaction. He had made good! Thus far there was no cause for him to drop his eyes in the presence of his father; and his mother — she who had borne not alone the pains of bringing him into the

world; but also, all unaided, the burden of his training and education — her labor had not been in vain.

Yes, he could with equanimity face both the past and the present. They had not been flawless. Nay, in many a detail, he admitted humbly, they might have been bettered. Nevertheless, on them rested no stain. He must now match them with a future of corresponding integrity of purpose.

Of late the strain of constant work had begun to tell upon him. In years he had allowed himself no vacation, or at best only a brief one. Now a day had come when if he was successfully to shoulder the weight of responsibility put upon him a longer respite from work was imperative. Therefore at the entreaty of his associates he had reluctantly sought out a quiet spot by the sea where during the span of a few short months he hoped to regain the strength he needed.

Such was the history of Norman Minot, and such the quest that had brought him and his mother to Wilton.

## CHAPTER IX

### PHILOSOPHIES AND PHILOSOPHERS

PERHAPS had Mrs. Mayhew been better informed concerning her new acquaintances she would not so sanguinely have declared that young men never knew what they wanted.

Norman Minot knew very definitely indeed what he wanted.

First of all he had desired, and had resolutely toiled for a fine education.

His next goal had been for business success, and this also he had attained.

He now aimed for a third prize, a wife.

He had always intended to marry and have children. Was it not his duty both as an American, and as the last descendant of a distinguished New England line? He had even settled upon the precise kind of woman he would choose, and the only reason he had not up to the present made a search for her replica was because, like many another earnest of purpose, he had been accustomed to concentrate his entire attention upon a single thing at a time. Having now, however, crossed two of his aspirations off life's memorandum he was ready to

turn his mind to the third, and from now on give to it his undivided interest. Why this last item should be any more difficult of accomplishment than had been the other two he did not see, and he looked forward to marking it off his list in the same methodical fashion as he had done its forerunners.

Not that Norman Minot was a conceited man.

He was, on the contrary, a person of ingratiating modesty.

Nevertheless, such was his confidence in his persistence that he had come to have supreme faith in his power to carry out anything he determined to do. Hard work had never daunted him, an obstacle always acting as a spur rather than as a deterrent. Was he not by training a hurdler? The blood in his veins quickened at the sight of the barrier in his path; and the higher it was the more keen the sport of the run for momentum, the rise into the air, and the final triumphant bound over its summit. It was in this spirit he had surmounted his educational and business difficulties. Now for the last great leap of all!

In anticipation of his marriage he had for the past few years been quietly watching the young women of his social coterie. There were two who, so far as he could gauge their attainments, might be eligible. Both were girls of established position, of New England birth, of culture, education, and robust health — an attribute he held highly impor-

tant to the well-being of coming generations. He was not, it is true, in love with either of them; but then, he reasoned, this was chiefly because he had resolved never to allow himself to fall in love until he had the leisure to surrender himself to this unsettling sensation. No doubt he could be in love with whichever of the two he decided upon; and once in love, the rest was easy. He would compel the lady to listen. Until such time arrived why waste one's energy?

It was a youthful philosophy, logically formulated by a student who, debarred by study from a broad knowledge of the world, had had little opportunity to peruse his own species. That a system that had worked successfully when applied to affairs of the head should fail when applied to affairs of the heart, was beyond the grasp of his legal mind. Would not such a failure be a violation of law, and was not law the keynote of the universe?

Therefore, argued Norman Minot, he would first get himself back to his normal degree of health by a well-earned vacation, and later he would return to town there not only to resume his work but with serious purpose attack the problem of winning a wife.

He was thirty-five years old.

It was high time he settled down and began to found a family.

It had not been one of his calculations that at a

small cottage in the heart of a still smaller fishing community he might run against persons from his own world. Wilton was isolated, and he fancied himself the only person from the outside who had heard of its existence.

Therefore, when jaded and spent, he had fled with his mother to the refuge of the Harlow homestead, it was extremely annoying to find beneath the same roof other persons, persons of the very circle from which he was attempting to escape. He did not wish to make the effort to be agreeable to anybody, much less to this vulgar Mrs. Mayhew and her shallow daughter. Was there no such thing as peace to be had in the world? No spot where it was possible to go and be alone?

For a week the struggle for courtesy was a taxing one. Then slowly the balm from shoreward winds, the healing from wooded slopes stole over him with their magic. After all, it was not the fault of the Mayhews that they were there. Nor could the courses of science be reversed so that unfortunates like Dora Mayhew might select their own mothers. As for the western origin of the pair, well, there was but one band of chosen people, and they were greatly blessed. Everyone could not be born in Boston.

Accordingly he forgave Mrs. Mayhew her strident voice; forgave her her commonplaceness and her lack of intellect; forgave her for over-dressing

in an environment with which nothing but extreme simplicity was in harmony. He forgave her everything except Dora!

Dora at a distance was one thing. In that capacity she was even rather an addition to the landscape. But Dora eternally at his heels was quite another matter. He did not want her babble in his ears, her smile in his face every moment of every day. To cast classics to the winds, she got on his nerves. He was rapidly approaching a condition of mind when unless she was called off he would be forced to the ungallant necessity of saying to her mother: "Madam, I pray you bear your daughter hence lest, driven to madness, I cast her into the sea."

But just as this crisis seemed imminent a kind of lotos-eating stupor began to dull his senses. Irritation gave place to languor, languor to amusement, amusement to tolerance. Dora moved amid a sleepy haze, and the ripple of her conversation began to be soothing instead of nerve-wracking. After all, she was rather a nice girl. One couldn't be alone every minute; and his mother, although the best and most patient of comrades, must not be dragged mercilessly about through woodroads, over dunes, and to mile-distant golf links.

Dora was ready to go anywhere.

It was quite pleasant to discover a person who rose in the morning in a receptive rather than in

a creative mood. If he wished to walk, a walk was of all earthly possibilities the thing Dora most desired; if he elected to sit beneath the apple-trees and read, why, Dora had just said to Mother: "What a day to give one's self up to a book!" Or golf? She had been pining for golf!

She was cooperative to the annihilation of any preferences at all.

Yet somehow since he still lacked the zeal to battle with opposition, this docility was gratifying. It smoothed the chipped edges of his nerves. To have been obliged to cope just now with another personality as dominating as his own would have been unbearable. That was why he avoided Deborah Harlow. By her very attitude she forced him to defend himself, and at present he did not feel able to do so.

Fortunately he saw very little of her, for whenever he ventured to the kitchen threshold with pleas for string or wrapping-paper, she always blocked his passage. Over her shoulder he could catch a glimpse of Tressie, a veritable Cinderella in gown of gingham, bending over the dishpan; but he never was permitted to approach nearer to this masquerading princess. Nor did the dining-room offer opportunity for better acquaintance, and the girl never appeared elsewhere. Therefore having exhausted excuses of twine, paper, and sinkers, he had not the energy to proceed further.

After all, what difference did it make? The girl was unquestionably beautiful but doubtless, like many another beauty, her chief charm lay in her face. Nature was a very fair dealer. Probably the brain of this pretty little creature was as empty as a deserted bird's-nest. Norman Minot had never enjoyed talking to empty-headed women. He did not talk to Dora; she talked to him.

There was, however, one very soul-satisfying mind in the seaside abode, and to it Norman found himself turning for invigoration. This was the mind of Nathan Harlow. The workings of this simple intellectual mechanism afforded the young lawyer intense delight, and it was not only because he enjoyed sailing but because it would mean hours in the company of this naïve spirit, that he welcomed the Mayhews' capitulation of the *Sylph*.

Nathan had had much leisure during his tranquil existence to sit and think.

All the men of Wilton sat, but Norman questioned whether their mental machinery whirled as nimbly as did Nate's.

"I've kinder turned 'bout everything over in my mind one time or 'nother," observed the dreamer, when one day the two men were scudding in the yawl out toward the lightship. "Queer the things you'll think of, ain't it? Neckties, now! Ain't it funny how certain kinds of neckties will tell you just the sort of men inside 'em? There was a New

York feller come to the Junction one summer who wore big checkered clothes, an' had more neckties than you ever saw to any one man. The chambermaid, Sarah Libbie Lewis, said there was a good hundred of 'em. They was mostly bright-colored, with big figures, an' he wore a great diamond horseshoe pin to hold 'em together. Folks said he was a racin' man."

Nate paused to shift the sail.

"Now his neckties warn't a mite like the artist chap that came to Belleport sketchin'; he wore a kind of soft, floppin' bow under his chin. It looked all right on him, but 'twould 'a' been almighty queer on the horse-dealer. Fur's that goes the horseshoe wouldn't 'a' made a hit on the artist, either."

He laughed.

"Then there's our minister. I reckon if I was to see a white cotton bow that snaps on with an elastic lyin' round, I'd be mortal sure Parson Perkins would heave into sight in another minute. Why, if he was to wear any other kind of a tie I'd feel as if I was aimed for eternal damnation. They certain do tell a lot about a man!" He ruminated in silence for an instant. "There's Uncle Martha, now. (We call him that 'cause he ain't never been anybody unless his wife was at his elbow.) Well, that man ain't worn anything but a black necktie since he was born. Once I asked him if he didn't

get eternal sick of it, an' why he didn't put on a red one for a change. He said he'd like nothin' better but he just hadn't the nerve to put a red one on. That's him all over. He said he always felt safe in a black one."

Again Nate meditated.

"I remember havin' a bright purple necktie once," he mused. "Some man gave it to me in exchange for a bucket of scallops. My eye, but it was a spanker! But Deborah, she see it, an' said 'twarn't no thing for me to be wearin'; so she cut it up an' put it into a biscuit pillow."

"Hard luck!"

"'Twas. Mebbe, though, 'twas just as well."

Nate brought the boat about.

"Somehow when you think of all the time an' fuss that goes into pickin' out a necktie, ain't it kinder ironic, when all's said an' done, that the thing is stuck right under a man's chin where he can't fur the life of him see it?"

The fisherman broke into a guffaw of laughter.

"That's the beateree to me! Likely the Lord figgered out that mortals would get vain if they could see their crownin' glories all the time. So He put a man's tie under his chin, an' a woman's hat on the top of her head. I guess 'twas wise of Him, too."

Norman joined in Nate's chuckle.

It was these presentations of Cape philosophy

that rendered Nathan such an entertaining and endearing companion.

The younger man wondered idly whether the niece Tressie had inherited any of her uncle's characteristics. Probably not. Few women were gifted with a sense of humor. Even his mother refused to smile when he dubbed the Boston paper to which she pinned her faith the Rock of Ages.

It is always the other fellow who is the joke.

All of which goes to prove that had Mr. Norman Minot's vision been less obscured by his own shadow he might even have found something to smile at in his own serious personality.

## CHAPTER X

### TRESSIE

HAVING fully established in his own mind the status of his relation to Dora Mayhew, Norman Minot felt entirely justified in seeking her society unreservedly. What possible harm could there be in passing the idle hours of a summer day with an attractive girl who liked what he liked, or pretended she did; and who was not by any chance a candidate for the honor of being the future Mrs. Minot?

Therefore he walked with Dora; golfed with Dora; drove with Dora; read with Dora; and as a result of this intimacy he soon found himself unearthing quite a different Dora from the frothy, chattering echo he had at first supposed her. This Dora, it proved, had opinions, some of them very worthy ones; furthermore, she expanded into a creature of sufficient fearlessness to differ from him — a discovery that greatly increased his respect for her. How he had under-rated her mentality!

He had now been several weeks at Wilton, and the successive stages of irritation and languor were giving place to an increase of energy. Promptings of his normal self were stirring within him. Hence

this spirit of Dora's, which at the outset would have antagonized him, now whetted into pleasurable activity his awakening faculties. Twice the two personalities had clashed, and when they crossed swords in argument it was he who had been forced to lower his blade. The experience astounded and stimulated him. Unquestionably there was much more to Dora than he had suspected. His indifference as to how she regarded him began to turn to anxiety. No man likes a pretty woman to think him a boor. As he reviewed his conduct he feared he must at first have behaved with deplorable gaucherie, and he now took every pains to efface his former ungraciousness, with the result that in his eagerness to atone for the past he completely misled Dora.

What construction, save one, could a girl put upon this sudden and earnest desire to please?

The man's high-bred indifference had always been interesting. It piqued one's pride. Now that he tempered it to solicitude, he became compelling. Even without effort charm was native to him, and when he chose to exert this power its fascination increased ten-fold. It was, unfortunately, a quality very elastic of interpretation, and how was Dora Mayhew to understand that she was the outlet for its energy simply because she chanced to be the sole star in Norman's present firmament?

In the meantime the girl's mother missed no

phase of the drama before her. With as much zeal as she dared display she urged her daughter on. She moved carefully, however, for Dora she had long since discovered was not always an amenable quantity. Sometimes Mrs. Mayhew had found caution a wiser policy than aggressiveness. Nevertheless the mother in her was gratified at the turn affairs were taking — extremely gratified. She had always contended that propinquity was the weightiest factor in the culmination of a marriage.

At the same time that Mrs. Mayhew was thus summarizing the human photo play before her, Mrs. Minot was also observing it. No misgivings agitated her mind. Did she not know her son far too well to be misled into taking the present at other than its face value? Norman would not for a moment seriously consider presenting her with a daughter-in-law like Dora Mayhew. The bare idea was ridiculous. His traditions, his bringing-up would all be against such a course. The Mayhews themselves must realize that. Doubtless they accepted the affair with the same lightness that she did. Nevertheless, in spite of this belief, she ventured to give her son a word of warning, at which he laughed immoderately.

"Now my dear, romance-building Mother, you must not let your imagination run away with your common sense! Dora Mayhew and I are nothing in the world but good chums, positively nothing. I'm

not denying that I like her, or that it is pleasant to have a girl to trot about with; but as for its being anything serious, that's absurd. No one would tell you so quicker than Dora herself. She perfectly understands it."

In this belief it is only fair to say that Norman was sincere. The workings of his mind were so clear to him that it seemed as if all the world must read aright what was so obvious. He would have scorned to amuse himself at a woman's expense. But he was not amusing himself with Dora. On the contrary through the long days of intimacy, an intimacy such as he had never before enjoyed with any other girl, he had come to entertain a genuine regard for her. That she reciprocated this feeling he was sure, since she went to no pains to conceal her liking for him. It was a jolly, frank cordiality on both sides, he argued; perfectly fair and perfectly blameless.

Hence with no qualms of conscience he continued to plan his days around his boating, and around Dora. One recreation afforded a welcome relief from the other. When he sailed he went with Nate and sometimes with his mother. Mrs. Minot, however, cared little for yachting. The coquetries of ever-shifting winds and tides failed to lure her with the spell they exerted over the real sea lover. Norman, on the other hand, a true child of Neptune, exulted in every caprice of the deep. Let the ocean

dimple or frown, it was all one to him. The sun flashing on the dancing bay was not a whit more alluring than was a sullen sky, beneath whose dome snarled an angry waste of white-caps. In this respect he and Nate were yoked in kinship; and had he but known it another heart beat in harmony with theirs, the heart of Tressie Harlow.

Tressie, however, was an unreckoned factor in Norman Minot's days. Seldom did she cross his path, and when she did it was always with a half-curl of the lip, and with head held high. Had not this Paris chosen another Helen? His preference was quite justifiable, too, and a thing to be expected. She would play understudy to no woman. Yet she harbored no ill-will either toward him or toward Dora. Indeed, within the confines of the Mayhews' chambers she and Dora had many a chat, forgetting social differences in girlish discussions of clothes and hair-dressing. Frequently a blouse that had been outgrown; a pair of silk stockings that did not match; a gown that had ceased to please; found their way into Tressie's lap. But these intimacies were never continued in public. The dream of anything but a superficial friendship between the two had long since vanished. Dora was too much occupied with her own absorbing adventures to devote her leisure to Tressie; and Tressie in her turn had too many household tasks to cultivate Dora's acquaintance, even had the visitor desired it.

Therefore they met cordially, but for brief intervals; and when they did, ever between them loomed the estranging barrier of Norman Minot.

Although Tressie still rebelled against the injustice of her lot, she had come to accept as inevitable the knowledge that her hope to gain the vision of a broader horizon through the eyes of either of these privileged persons had been an empty phantasy. She was no part of their world; she never had been, and she never would be. Their presence beneath her roof was, as her aunt had from the first maintained, merely a financial necessity. With dumb pride she must struggle to perform her part in the contract, that was all.

Even Deborah realized that the girl had now settled down to being more helpful. No longer did her gaze follow the figures of Dora and Norman as they crossed the dunes. Their goings and comings had ceased to interest her.

"I needn't have lost a wink of sleep worryin' about havin' a man in the house," soliloquised Deborah, at the same time drawing a long, comfortable breath. "Tressie has better sense than I gave her credit for. She pays no more attention to this Minot feller than if he was a piece of driftwood washed up on the beach."

In consequence the older woman began to modify her attitude toward Norman Minot. He certainly was a well-spoken young man who never forgot

his manners, and who showed his good bringing-up. Moreover, he never made any trouble; and as for his room, it was the picture of neatness. She had never known so orderly a man. Gradually she allowed some of this approval to percolate to the surface, and to this change of front Norman was quick to respond. Was her prickly exterior but a shell after all? Perhaps, speculated he, he had been misjudging Deborah as well as Dora. He had been in such a beastly frame of mind when he arrived in Wilton that possibly he had distorted everybody's personality.

In this general reversal of judgment he was nevertheless piqued to find that in winning Tressie's favor he made no headway. Thus far, it was true, only the slightest opportunity for acquaintance had offered; but such advances as chance permitted had met with no response. Apparently the girl neither liked nor disliked him. She greeted his efforts at conversation with courteous indifference, making it evident that Mr. Norman Minot was a person of no concern to her whatsoever. Possibly a man of Norman's logical cast of mind might have accepted this edict without further comment, merely deducing from it the psychological hypothesis that everybody does not attract everybody — a fact to be granted as part of the divine plan of things. But just as his philosophy had reduced itself to this comforting conclusion a circumstance occurred that overthrew

his theories, and whipped his pride into action.

One afternoon it was necessary for him to walk to the village to post an important letter, and as Dora was nowhere to be found he was forced to set out on the expedition alone. When part way on his journey he rounded a curve and saw before him Tressie Harlow, to all appearances also bent on walking to Wilton. Here was a bit of luck! He quickened his pace.

Whether the girl heard his step on the sand, or happened to turn just at that moment he could not tell; but she glanced over her shoulder and on observing him left the path, plunging instead into a wooded cross-road that would bring her to the village by a more circuitous route.

Norman stopped abruptly.

She could not have been intending to go that way; it was much longer, and the day was hot. Only one interpretation remained. She had taken the bridle-path for the purpose of avoiding him.

Instantly his resentment awakened.

What had he done that any girl should prefer a half-mile detour to having him as an escort?

Did he cut such an unattractive figure in the eyes of this provincial beauty that she did not care to walk with him? Or had he unwittingly given her cause for offense?

His old hurdling instinct rose to the surface.

He would go on to the town, await the coming of

this scornful creature who thus flouted him, and accompany her home whether she willed it or not.

Accordingly he loitered along, calculating his progress with such nicety that when he turned homeward he and Tressie Harlow came face to face at the corner of the harbor road.

There was nothing for the girl now but to smile and greet him, and this she did with an irritating composure.

But Norman was in fighting mood, and would not allow the incident to be thrust so lightly aside.

Her act had been deliberate, and he knew she was conscious that his had been equally so.

Blocking her path he looked down at her accusingly.

"Well?"

"Well?" she returned with baffling hauteur.

He had expected when she found herself trapped that she would enter some plea for defense, or at least state her case; at argument he felt quite at home.

But she did neither.

Instead she looked at him, biting her lips; though whether in anger or amusment he could not tell.

As this monosyllabic duel opened no avenue for conversation he stood silent a moment; then without speaking reached forward with boyish indignation and masterfully took from her hands the packages she was carrying.

"Look out!" she cried. "There are eggs in that bag."

"Why did you run away from me?" he demanded, scarce listening to the caution.

"I didn't run away. I simply wanted to — be — by — myself."

"Do you still wish so?"

"I'm — I'm — not — sure."

"Won't you kindly decide?"

"It is difficult for me to make up my mind," was the teasing reply. "You see if I go alone I shall have all the bundles to carry, and they're heavy."

The words were demure, but they were accompanied by a mischievous glance terminating in a dropping of the eyes, that left a fringe of long lashes on the blushing cheek.

"You might send the parcels home by me."

"That wouldn't be polite."

"As polite as avoiding me in the first place."

"Maybe it was to save your being burdened with the packages."

"I don't believe it."

"Now who is impolite?"

"But you did mean to run away. You are always escaping somewhere, and giving me no chance to talk to you," grumbled Norman.

"I never dreamed you wanted to talk to me," came provokingly from Tressie.

"I do."

The desire crystallized at the moment with a force that astonished him.

Tressie colored.

"Well," she observed, dimpling, "here I am. What do you wish to say?"

There was a tantalizing daring in the words.

"Oh, why — well — lots of things," stammered the discomfited young man vaguely. "I —"

He halted.

Where was the poise and eloquence with which he had addressed courts and harangued juries?

In place of the fluent-tongued lawyer he suddenly lapsed into a speechless, disconcerted schoolboy, and without completing his sentence strode along beside her.

The pause, however, did not appear to matter.

It lengthened into silence, it is true; but the silence was an intimate one that seemed to isolate the two from the rest of the universe.

Far across the bay shoals of silver sand, bare to the arching sky pierced the blueness, little ripples of foam lapping their sweeping shores; there drifted inland the music of the breakers as they alternately dragged down into the depths of their glassy hollows myriads of tiny stones, then tossed them high on the beach again. The sun shone down radiantly and, as if a part of the glory of the day, along the harbor road moved the man and woman.

Presently they began speaking softly, talking of the Cape; of Wilton; of Tressie's home; of her aunt and uncle. From the artless replies to his questions Norman Minot reconstructed so accurate a picture of the girl's life that had she beheld it she would have been chagrined. Into the fabric of her narrative was woven her passionate affection for her uncle; her timid and half-shrinking admiration for her aunt; her hunger for beauty, for youthful companionship, for all the tender dream-things that make up woman's existence.

Norman was a clever cross-examiner.

He drew the girl's thoughts from her without her guessing it.

As she so innocently spun for his inspection the tapestry of her soul there constantly recurred in the weaving a thread of scarlet — the cry of the waking woman to become a part of the current of life — to know, to live, to love.

Very beautiful she was, this being the many facets of whose gem-like nature were as varied as were the changing lights on the waves, or the note of some instrument which under the artist's touch gives out its gamut of varied tone! The man who listened had in him an answering fineness that responded to the beauty of her every thought. In and out, in and out, the shuttle of her fancy moved; now introducing the gay color of humor; now a sombre touch of sadness. And when suddenly she

ceased as if wearied of her loom, the product she held before his eyes was exquisite with innocence, purity, and fire.

Norman Minot, having been brought to an appreciation of sensitively attuned natures through comradeship with his mother, could not but think what a delight it would be to transplant this child with her rare beauty, and still rarer soul, to the environment for which her heart yearned. Think of the joy that would come with seeing the bud, now stunted by an uncongenial soil, open into flower! To be the hand that wrought this miracle — what a dream for a lover, what a reality for a man!

He shrugged his shoulders, banishing the reverie.

Miracles were now, alas, things of the past.

Life was a very prosaic affair.

Probably no magician would ever take Tressie Harlow by the hand and into her ear breathe the words:

"Behold, I will show you a mystery."

Instead, within the confines of the actual, the girl's kaleidoscopic nature would be cramped to conform to the narrow, austere, unsatisfying demands of a petty horizon. So it was written in the stars!

It was a pity, but such were the conundrums of Fate.

Evidently the girl herself had sought an answer to the enigma and, like him, had failed to solve the

riddle. He did not wonder that the apparent injustice of her lot baffled her. Had she but been granted the opportunities of some more fortunate woman — a woman like Dora Mayhew, for example —

He started.

Dora Mayhew seemed as far removed from a being like Tressie Harlow as was another planet.

It came to him with sudden realization that during the entire afternoon he had not thought once of Dora Mayhew.

## CHAPTER XI

### ALTRUISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

HAVING had this glimpse of Tressie Harlow, Norman resolved he would not a second time put himself in the way of repeating the adventure, since to his annoyance he discovered it had left behind it a train of haunting reveries not only unsettling but also out of all proportion to its importance. This resolve made, however, he promptly refused it by at once beginning to scheme as to how he might see Tressie again.

He did not for one moment intend to put false notions into the child's pretty little head by paying her the attentions he might have paid a girl of his own circle; that would be highly dishonorable, and Norman Minot was the soul of honor. But was she not a fellow-creature who was starving for simple pleasures and for beautiful things? If from the superior elevation of his own good fortune he could reach down to her a helping hand, and place some of the joys she craved in her pathway it was surely a legitimate and quite blameless thing to do. Norman had a kind, sympathetic h[redacted]

he was sorry for Tressie — very sorry indeed. But for the grace of God, he said to himself, he might have been born in Wilton. A generous deed never failed in its appeal to him; and when such generosity did not demand too great self-sacrifice, and the object of the charity was an exceedingly winsome maiden, altruism acquired a zest that rendered it irresistible.

Accordingly, when on the next day he went sailing with Nate, he remarked with affected casualness:

"Does your niece care for sailing at all, Captain Harlow?"

"Care for it?" cried Nate. "Good Lord! Why, Tressie loves a boat as she loves nothin' else on earth! She can sail one, too, like an old salt. I shouldn't be a mite afraid to trust her with the *Sylph,* an' that's mor'n I'd be willin' to do with any man that navigates these waters. To be sure, I've never let her out alone yet; but that's chiefly because the sails are too heavy for her to manage, not because she couldn't handle the boat right 'nough."

"I had no idea she was such a yachtsman."

"Bless your heart, she's a chip of the old block! All our people have been seafarin' folks, an' Tressie comes honestly by it. I taught her to sail when she warn't knee high to a grasshopper," continued Nate, glowing with pride.

"Perhaps, then, she would like to come out with you and me some day."

"She'd admire to," Nate answered. "Before you came she always used to go; but now there is more to do at home, an' her aunt needs her. Besides, as you're hirin' the boat she thinks she's no business taggin' along unless she's asked."

"I'm sorry I've been cutting her off from a sport she enjoys," Norman returned with genuine concern. "I had no idea she was so keen on it. Suppose some day I was to ask Miss Deborah if she could spare her. She seems to have so few pleasures."

"That's so," Nate agreed gloomily. "The poor child has been housed this summer like a snail in its shell. She's not used to it, either. Still, I'm dretful afraid Deborah won't —"

"Couldn't they both go?"

Nathan burst into a chuckle at the absurdity of the suggestion.

"Mercy! Why, man alive, you wouldn't get my sister aboard a boat unless every inch of dry ground had been swallered up, an' there warn't a patch of it to stand on!"

Notwithstanding the vividness of this metaphor the philanthropist was not to be deterred, and that very afternoon he eagerly extended to Deborah his invitation.

She was immensely flattered.

Spinster though she was, she was not so hardened as to be totally impervious to the appeal of masculine attention.

She never sailed, she regretted to say. Nevertheless, it was very kind of Mr. Minot to ask her.

The disappointment with which Mr. Minot received this announcement flattered her still more.

It seemed a pity to meet such kindly advances with curt refusal.

Tressie might go. That at least would be a compromise, and show appreciation for the young man's thoughtfulness. Possibly an afternoon in the air might do the child good. She deserved some reward for so faithfully and uncomplainingly performing her home duties.

Prompted by these motives, Deborah summoned her niece and suggested the plan.

To Tressie the surprise was complete, overwhelming, almost unbelievable.

She had never expected to be setting forth over the dunes with Mr. Minot, and even when she found herself doing so the fact was like a dream.

What a day it was! Had the gods made it themselves it could not have been more perfect. The atmosphere was so clear one could even trace the spars of the lightship against the sky; and see afar off the tips of masts whose phantom hulks had dropped below the horizon and been lost on the other side of the world.

As they sped across the sands the two voyagers scarcely spoke; but the luminous glow in the girl's eyes thrilled Norman with pleasure.

Nate was waiting for them at the float, and with every inch of the *Sylph's* canvas thrown to the breeze, the three launched away. The green waters curled from the prow of the yawl in furrows of foam as she cut her way through the surf, flinging high in air a mist of flashing spray. The hiss of the waves against the boat's side, the wash of the billows about her keel, was like music.

At the helm stood Tressie, all self-consciousness stripped from her. If she had known vexations, had battled with jarring elements, these annoyances, in the face of Nature's immensity, had taken on their proper values and shrunk into shadows. With hair blowing in the sunlight, eyes scanning the vastness before her, lips parted with childlike abandon, she was the incarnation of happiness. So, thought Norman Minot as he watched her, would she look, should life ever open to her its sealed books. He could not take his gaze from the radiant vision. It photographed itself on his memory with such vividness that for days it came between him and everything he did. Long, long afterward when he conjured up the symbol of supreme joy it was ever Tressie Harlow as she looked that day with face turned seaward, and profile cameo-like against the blue of the arching sky.

The afternoon was a page out of fairyland. It seemed as if the three were a trio of children transported to some Utopian playground where, for a fleeting interval, they were permitted to indulge to their heart's content in the thing that pleased them best.

Only too quickly the hours flew past, and the sunlight faded, then brightened to an aftermath of crimson glory. A soft mist stole upward from the sea's caverns, melting into violet the outlines of the shore, and throwing into brilliancy a single star that trembled in the western heaven. Like a homing bird back to her moorings drifted the *Sylph,* and back across the dunes came the three seafarers. Salt coated their cheeks, and the taste of it was on their lips; while in their hearts reigned an unutterable peace and a closer fellowship.

This venture having proved so successful Norman Minot bestirred himself to try other philanthropic experiments. He sought out the Harlows when, their work done, they sat at dusk on the doorstep, and with all the eloquence he could command he pictured his travels; related odd experiences; and talked of books and pictures. He ascertained when Tressie's leisure moments were, and often read poetry to her, selecting lyrics to whose appeal he felt sure she would respond. Under other conditions these trifling kindnesses might have caused Deborah perturbation; but as Norman in no way

slackened his attentions to Dora Mayhew they were received merely as "Mr. Minot's gentlemanly way of tryin' to be nice to everybody."

So, in fact, thought Norman himself.

That the pleasures he gave to Tressie came back to him in three-fold measure he did not observe; or if he did he would not acknowledge it.

Shelley, Keats, Masefield, Sill had long been favorites of his; and although the experience of setting such gems before a plastic, impressionable mind gave to them fresh glamour, their fascination for him was nothing new. The light they brought into Tressie's eyes was unquestionably gratifying to see; nevertheless, he told himself, he did not read the verses because of that light.

Sometimes during the reading Nathan would stroll over to the bench beneath the apple-trees and listen; and occasionally even Deborah herself. The melodies of the poets, however, were not for her; nor did the rhythm of their song reach the fisherman.

"I can't fur the life of me tell what that Shelley feller is drivin' at," Nate would remark to his sister afterward. "There ain't head nor tail to his talk. Ain't it a wonder a sensible man like Mr. Minot can be took with such stuff? 'Tain't likely Tressie gets much more out of it than we do. Still, if he wants to read 'bout skylarks, clouds, an' things to her he may's well. 'Twon't do no harm."

It was indeed true that at first the major part of

what the girl experienced was a groping for the elusive beauty conveyed in a mysterious sense by the cadence of Norman Minot's voice. She listened raptly to the poems, and later read them alone. Then slowly out of the vagueness a new realm, strange and exquisite, began to unfold before her. Some of her sleeping selves awakened, answering to the call of the master whose children they were.

And all this time that Norman, the altruist, was congratulating himself that he was putting within Tressie's reach the treasures of the world he was failing to recognize that by so doing a hitherto unknown ecstasy was stealing into his own life. Although he still beguiled his hours with Dora, at the back of his mind like an unbidden ghost there constantly moved the presence of Tressie Harlow.

He thought of her when the rose of morning tinted the dunes; he felt her charm in the witching moods of the sea, the fragrance of the pines, the ruby splendor of the sunset. Her intangible spell was in the mists that purpled the hills, and shrouded in infinitude the deeps. Beneath and behind every perfection of the universe reigned her power. That she was not of his actual world he knew; but of his real world she seemed to have been an integral part since the beginning. It was not a union of externals but rather a kinship of that which was within. Beside such a relation social boundaries were meaningless, autocratic, and ab-

surd. Could one confine within limits the fires of the sun, the lustre of the moon, the immeasurable things of the spirit; the beating of heart with heart? Such phenomena defied man's petty restrictions. It was a bond of this mystic quality that linked him to Tressie — a bond without name, without sex; a tie of common vibration as if the two, when created, had been pitched to the same key and henceforth gave out the same harmonies.

Within such a small circle as that in which life moved at Wilton it was inevitable that any variation in the routine of the home should pass unnoticed.

Mrs. Mayhew saw Norman's growing interest in the Harlow family and by and by spoke of it to Dora.

"What's happened between you and Mr. Minot?"

"Happened? Nothing, Mother."

"He seems to be spending a great deal of his time with Tressie Harlow."

"Does he?"

Dora raised her brows in feigned surprise.

"Isn't he?" demanded her mother sharply.

"I don't know. Perhaps so. You see, Mr. Minot does not consider it beneath his dignity to talk with anyone he chooses."

Dora could not resist the fling.

"He can. The Minots are perfectly sure of themselves. Whatever odd thing they ordained t

do would be passed off as eccentric. We can't afford to. Folks would think we didn't know any better," retorted her mother shamelessly.

Dora laughed.

"You certainly have no illusions regarding our social status, Mother."

"How can I have? Haven't I seen the thing work out that way scores of times? But I'll tell you right now, Dora, that you cannot afford to play fast and loose with that young man."

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough. More than a month has gone by, and you haven't yet got Norman Minot to the point of any definite understanding. You're very foolish to slack up your line until you've landed your fish. You take a great chance. Sometimes it wriggles off."

"I've no desire to marry Norman Minot against his will," Dora responded proudly. "I wouldn't marry any man who had to be corralled into marrying me."

"Nonsense! You talk like a green school-girl. I don't want to compel anybody to marry you any more than you do. But all men shrink from committing themselves. When they have once taken the plunge and settled the matter, they are far happier. It is a girl's place to —"

"Well, I shan't do it," cut in Dora scornfully. "Any man who marries me must do his own love-

making. I've run after Norman Minot enough. I shall not lift my finger to —"

"To prevent his falling in love with this penniless village girl?"

Dora winced.

"How absurd, Mother!"

"It isn't absurd. Stranger things have happened."

"But they see next to nothing of one another. He has, to be sure, taken her out sailing a few times; but always with her uncle. And he reads to her. But so he does to me."

She smiled consciously.

"Well, you know your own business best — at least I hope you do," answered Mrs. Mayhew with finality. "I should, however, be sorry to see you jilted for an ignorant fisherman's daughter with not half your wits, money, or education."

The thrust told.

"I can take care of myself," replied Dora piqued.

"We shall see whether you can or not," came cuttingly from the elder woman.

## CHAPTER XII

### A NEWCOMER

SUCH is the strange complexity of human nature that Norman Minot's increasing interest in Tressie led him to safeguard himself into being more than ever with Dora Mayhew. When he was not sailing the two often went to Belleport for golf, and afterward lingered until sunset in the rustic tea-room that capped the bluff. It was a sightly spot secluded in honeysuckle, and commanding a magnificent ocean panorama from its vine-framed windows.

Today, the game finished, the golfers sought this haven and dropped wearily into the wicker chairs at their regular table. There was no need to give an order, for the little maid in attendance was quite accustomed to their coming, and knew precisely what they wanted.

"My, but I'm tired!" exclaimed Dora, passing her hand over her burning cheeks. "And hungry, too. Aren't you?"

"A little; but I am chiefly angry," replied Norman with a scowl. "I never played such rotten golf in my life! I don't see what's got into me.

I'm all off my game. I'll try it just once more, and then if I don't pick up I shall quit for good."

"You won't feel so tomorrow."

"On the contrary, by tomorrow I shall probably feel that way more than ever. I put up a worse score every day."

"Cheer up! Here's tea! And smell the cinnamon toast; it is like a sandal-wood fan."

Dora sympathized with his mood. Nothing quenches one's enthusiasm like driving three times into a bunker. Therefore instead of pursuing the conversation she tactfully busied herself with filling the cups.

Norman took the fragrant beverage absently from her hand and began stirring the sugar about in it, at the same time gazing out on the sun-flooded turf that stretched between them and the sea.

Suddenly Dora saw him start.

He put his cup down hastily, and the spoon clattered to the floor.

"Jove!" he exclaimed. "If that isn't Kit!"

"Who?"

"Bob Kittridge, a chum of mine. How in heaven's name did he get here, do you suppose." His eyes lighted. "Would you mind if I left you for a moment, and ran after him? I simply must catch him before he escapes."

"Of course. Run along."

Dora watched him swing across the links and stop

beside a man in white flannels who was approaching the final hole.

The player turned.

He was tall, and his prematurely white hair was rendered the more striking by the contrasting blackness of his eyes and eyebrows, and the vivid red of his cheeks. An expression half grave, half cynical, gave a curl of mingled scorn and amusement to his lips which, however, now parted into a smile that displayed his perfectly formed white teeth.

"Norman Minot — by all the gods!"

"Kit!"

Instantly the hands of the two met in a quick, firm grip.

"What favoring zephyr wafts you here, Minot?"

Dora could see the stranger place a hand affectionately on Norman's shoulder as they talked. Then without waiting to finish his game Kittridge gathered up his clubs, and the men entered the teahouse.

"Miss Mayhew, I wish to present to you my friend, Mr. Kittridge," said Norman, drawing a third chair to the table. "Sit down, old chap."

"Thanks."

The newcomer glanced keenly at Dora, a flicker of interest in his eyes.

"What, may I ask, are you two people doing in this out-of-the-way corner of the universe?" he inquired.

"We might put the same question to you, Kit," Norman retorted.

"Oh, I'm easily explained. I'm down here sketching."

"You do not look the part, Mr. Kittridge," smiled Dora, with an arch motion of her head toward the bag of golf clubs.

"Alas, one can't paint every moment; canvases have to dry. Besides, a fellow needs exercise."

"Oh, he paints, all right; I can testify to that," put in Norman. "But I did not know you went in much for landscape work, Kit. Isn't that something new?"

"No. Whenever I want a holiday I drop the portraits and steal off with my colors to try my hand at these dunes. They've a tremendous fascination for me. The blues and greens along the Cape can't be equalled."

"Where are you staying, Kit?"

"At the Ocean View at Welham — a wretched hole of a place. Engaged my room for two months before I ever clapped eyes on the hotel. Haven't had a square meal since I arrived. Where are you folks?"

"At Wilton."

"Wilton! You don't mean that little Rip-Van-Winkle colony up the harbor road? What wouldn't I give to get some sketches from that spot! I didn't know there was any place to stay over there."

"There is no hotel. We're boarding with a fisherman's family."

"How on earth did you happen to choose that spot?"

"I was anxious for a rest, and for some good sailing," explained Norman.

"The town has a gem of a setting; I stumbled on it when motoring along the shore a couple of years ago and wanted the worst way to do some pictures there; but nobody would take me in. The natives were awfully stand-offish. Do you like it?"

Norman nodded.

"Immensely! Mater's here, and also Miss Mayhew's mother."

"I'd like to see your mother, Norman. She is the one person in the world who never fails to give me the benefit of the doubt."

Kittridge turned scrutinizingly toward Dora.

"And you, Miss Mayhew — how do you enjoy being a resident of Sleepy Hollow? You do not look in the least like a somnambulist."

Dora laughed prettily.

"I never thought I should care for a quiet place, but I find I like it very much."

"Are you also resting and sailing?"

There was a quizzical ring in the question.

The girl flushed.

"No, indeed," cut in Norman hastily. "She never rests, and she detests a boat."

"How do you manage to amuse yourself?"

The artist, ignoring his friend's interruption, still addressed Dora.

"I don't know. It is a lazy atmosphere. The days slip by before one realizes it. I'm afraid I don't do much of anything."

"Your program sounds attractive."

Glancing into her eyes, he held out his cup for more tea.

"May I?"

"Certainly."

"And no sugar this time, please."

There was a pause.

"I don't suppose —" Kittridge began presently.

"What, Kit?"

The man hesitated.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered vaguely. "I was just happening to wonder if there was such a thing as a room for me over where you are staying."

Norman put down his tea-cup.

"Why, I've no idea," returned he thoughtfully. "The house is a good-sized one — a really fine old homestead in its day, with a garden at the side, and a captain's walk on top. You may recall seeing it. It is by far the most pretentious place in Wilton. There would probably be room enough for you; but whether Miss Deborah would let you come would be another matter. The Harlows have never

before taken guests, you see. Still, she might grant you a corner."

"I don't see why she couldn't," chimed in Dora eagerly.

"It can do no harm to try," Norman said. Then, as if a sudden afterthought had come to him he added: "But what about the room you've engaged for the season at Welham, Kit?"

"At the hotel, you mean? What of it?"

"They might hold you."

"Nobody ever succeeded in holding me yet."

A dare-devil smile accompanied the innuendo, and Dora laughed.

"I tell you what we'll do, Norman. If you and Miss Mayhew have finished your golf why don't you let me run you back to the house in my car? Then I can present my compliments to your Lady Mother, and at the same time find out whether there is any chance of my getting in at the Harlows."

"A bully scheme, Kit!"

In fact, the more Norman thought over Kit's coming the stronger became the appeal of the plan. Kittridge, he knew, was a tireless yachtsman whose companionship would be a great pleasure; furthermore he would not only be a jolly addition to the home circle but in the present situation might prove most useful. Three was a less perilous number than two, and perhaps Kit would sometimes take

Dora off his hands and leave him more time to be with Tressie.

Norman blushed a little at the selfishness of his motives.

Yet he was not entirely egoistic in urging his friend to come, he argued, for Kittridge was a distinctly interesting person whom people never failed to enjoy. Much of his life had been spent in Paris, where he had come into intimate contact with a group of the most talented of the younger artists, musicians, and writers of its Bohemian coterie. He was a gifted talker, one whose opinions always commanded attention whether his listeners agreed with him or not. As to his personal character, Norman suspected it was the outcome of a very different code of morals from his own. However, it was only fair to take into account the influence a Latin-Quarter environment must have exerted upon a temperament like Kit's.

What life would not be to some extent colored by such an experience?

Despite this, Norman had never heard anything disparaging of Bob Kittridge. As a boy he may have been a bit gay at college; but that was years ago, and again one must consider the volcanic personality of the man. Human beings are not all turned out of the same mould. Whatever his record it had not prevented Kit from graduating with full honors, after which event he had abandoned his

plan for studying architecture and instead had gone to Paris, to throw all his energy into an artist's career. More than once he had exhibited his pictures at the Salon, and on returning home he had established a Boston studio from which he had turned out several note-worthy portraits.

He was a creature of intense moods, of loyal friendships, but of a markedly cynical outlook on life. Whether this attitude was a pose, or the sinister remnant of some adventure in the past Norman had never been quite able to determine. Nevertheless Kit was undeniably clever and his wit, sharpened to the verge of satire, made him an eagerly pursued dinner guest.

Not only would such an element enliven the Harlows' quiet household but, Norman reflected, the new guest would substantially swell their coffers, without materially increasing Deborah's domestic burden.

He did not see how anything but good could come of the plan.

Deborah, however, when greeted with the proposal did not grasp the happening as a fortunate one. She did not want any more men boarders; the one she already had had slipped in by mistake. Besides, more people meant more work, and she now had all she could do.

Argue as he would, Robert Kittridge saw that parley was useless.

"It's no go," he declared to Norman when he came out of the house. "I can't get at any reasons, but she just plain doesn't want me."

"Suppose I try."

"You're mighty kind, old chap, but it wouldn't be the least use."

"Maybe not; still, I can make a stab at it. Wait here in the garden until I come back."

Norman strode indoors, confronting Deborah at the threshold of her culinary fortress.

Winningly he presented his cause.

Deborah softened immediately.

Of course she was sorry to withhold hospitality from any friend of Mr. Minot's; she had not realized that the men knew one another so well. She confessed she had a room she was not using, and also owned that an additional person in the house did not materially increase her labor. She had not thought at all about the income from the automobile. It could stand in the vacant shed as well as not. To be sure, Wilton people did not like motor-cars, but if Mr. Kittridge would guarantee to be very careful not to run over any hens or children she did not see why her neighbors should have any real cause to object to a car in the village.

Norman could see her wavering, the thought of her multiplied savings drawing her on like a magnet.

At last, turning to the piecrust she was rolling out, she said over her shoulder:

"In view of Mr. Kittridge bein' your friend I guess I may's well let him come, Mr. Minot. You can tell him the room will be ready tomorrow."

"I'm awfully grateful to you, Miss Deborah."

"That's all right."

Deborah cut short the interview by wheeling abruptly into the pantry.

In triumph Norman returned to the garden.

Alone beneath the apple-tree he saw Robert Kittridge gazing tensely before him.

"It's all right, Kit," he called. "I've won her over."

There was no answer.

Norman crossed the grass to where his friend stood.

Still Kit did not turn.

He showed, however, that he had heard for he seized his chum's arm convulsively and whispered:

"Who's that girl?"

"What girl?"

"There! The one coming up the path?"

Norman followed his glance.

Moving slowly toward the house between the sun-flecked lines of willows he saw Tressie. Her arms were heaped with branches of azalea, and all unconscious of any near presence she was humming softly to herself.

As the two men watched, she disappeared into the house.

"That is Miss Harlow."

"Who?"

"The niece of the family."

"She lives here?"

"Yes."

"You didn't mention her."

"I guess I forgot about her," replied Norman lamely.

"Forgot about her! Why, good God, man, she is the only thing belonging to Wilton that is worth remembering!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### TRAPPED

PROBABLY had Norman Minot possessed a more intimate knowledge of Robert Kittridge's creed of life he would have realized that he had assumed no small responsibility in bringing Kit to Wilton.

Years rich in formative influences had passed over the heads of the two men since they had been college classmates, and in the meantime a broad acquaintance with human nature in divergent corners of the earth had granted to Kittridge a wonderful understanding of people, leaving him with but little faith in anything save the universal and elemental in mankind.

After all, what was civilization?

A structure reared on a network of man-made laws which the very persons who had framed them were employing every device to evade, thus converting into a pitiable sham an existence that might otherwise have been sincere and honest. Why should an autocratic product of man's brain decree that every being in the world be stamped in the image of his brother; and outwardly, at least, conform to the same inflexible laws? Instead of sup

pressing that which rendered one interesting and differentiated him from his fellows, why not fearlessly proclaim it? Individualism simply meant the individual against the rabble, and was it not true that often a man himself weighed his actions far more justly than did the clamoring, half-informed herd of critics who snarled at his heels? The more deeply Kit studied the species and beheld men and women smothered, cramped, mismated — cringing slaves to conventionalities that were meaningless — the scanter patience he had with creeds and dogmas.

For himself he had narrowed his beliefs down until they were as pagan as those of a sun-worshipper. His great quest was the quest of the beautiful. Heartily could he have subscribed to the confession of Louis Dubedat: "I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting," etc. What more was necessary?

To be sure, he owned with regret, he had been far more cowardly in putting this philosophy into practice than he should have been, but this was not because he was ashamed of his doctrines, but rather because on every hand he found himself so hampered by the scruples of those who persistently bowed before the fetishes of the accepted social order.

Yet with all this latitude of standard Kittridge was not in the slightest degree a lawless revolutionist who allowed his impulses and emotions to run riot. He escaped moving on the plane of the sensualist because of the respect he entertained for his own soul. That he was worth while he was certain, else why should he have been created? The very fact that man differed from man proved that each bore an individual message to humanity, a message which could be delivered only through that single medium. His was the message of beauty. He was not the sole interpreter of this message, he argued; but because he was unlike any other member of the race the vision granted him differed from that of every other human being. What he saw he beheld from his own peculiar angle, and it was visible to him alone.

Now beauty, ennobling as it is, when transformed to the keynote of one's existence led very far away from the rigid and unelastic principles that governed the life of a man like Norman Minot. The aims of the two were as opposed as the antipodes. Fortunately for the friendship of the men, however, the rush of daily living had prevented Norman from following Kit closely enough to analyze how vast was this divergence of motive. They had many tastes in common: music, poetry, pictures; the only difference being that what Norman enjoyed with his head Kit enjoyed with his

heart. This adverse viewpoint in their appreciation of the aesthetic they were wont to jest about, passing it off as a temperamental rather than a fundamental antagonism.

For notwithstanding the opposition of their natures Robert Kittridge had a genuine regard for Norman. He considered him narrow-minded, it is true — the product of the Puritanism that had given him birth. It seemed a pity that a man of Minot's intelligence should have permitted this influence to warp him into provincialism. Yet after all could any Puritan successfully stamp out the impress of his ancestry? It was not so easy to eradicate. At least Norman's consistency and sincerity of purpose were admirable, antiquated as his tenets were. Kit could endure anything but a self-righteous humbug. Therefore with mutual respect, forbearance, and affection as the cornerstones of their friendship the two had reared a structure that had weathered the years; and it was now through Norman's testimony to that friendship that Kit had made his entry into Wilton.

His presence was hailed with precisely the acclaim that Norman had foreseen it would be. Kit was a spur to humor, to argument, to enthusiasm. From the moment he took up his Salt-Lake-City napkin, declaring he had always pined to be a Mormon, he roused the spirits of the household to the highest pitch of good feeling. He bowed in homage

over Mrs. Minot's hand; cajoled Mrs. Mayhew; flattered Dora; bantered Norman. Deborah, puffed with pride at his commendation of her culinary prowess, unbent to the extent of favoring him with a second helping of pie — a boon very infrequently bestowed. As for Nate, the artist's skill at handling a boat won his instant admiration.

In the meantime, swept along by a personality novel, fascinating, and magnetic something in Tressie Harlow went out to meet this man who had power to color the mood of an entire assembly; who was alternately grave and gay; who compelled even the wheezy little melodeon to answer to his touch and give out unsuspected harmonies; and who worshipped at the altar of the beautiful as at a shrine. A subtle force, silent and indefinable, drew her toward him against her will. Angrily she recoiled from the thraldom that lured, bewitched, and terrified her. With Norman Minot she had always been tranquilly happy; but Kittridge roused in her something that until now had slumbered — a recklessness echoing his own; an exhilaration that attracted, thrilled, appalled. Her lack of experience with the world rendered her weaponless to face such combat. Instead, bewildered, and numbed almost to inertia, its seething tide caught her and carried her helplessly along in its current.

Whether Kittridge was conscious of the spell he cast over her, or whether he himself was a victim of

a state of mind similar to her own, she did not know. Sometimes when he forced her to meet his eye she wondered if it was from the artist's or the man's point of view that he was studying her. Yet he was always gentle, kindly, even courtly. His swift thrusts of wit which she would have been unequal to parrying he unfailingly directed toward Dora, never toward her. In fact there were times when he appeared to be avoiding her altogether, as if for some reason of his own he disliked her.

He sailed with Norman and used his car for the pleasure and convenience of the family, never scorning to do an errand for Deborah when it was necessary. Frequently he went off sketching by himself, often spending entire days alone on the shore. When he golfed, tramped, or motored with Dora it was always in Norman's company.

At length, after he had been more than a fortnight at Wilton, he one day confronted his chum on the veranda where the latter sat smoking.

"I say, old man, should you mind if I asked you a very personal question?"

"Of course not, Kit. Fire ahead."

"But this is infernally personal — impudent, fact."

Norman laughed.

"No matter."

"Well, it is just this: I can't for the life

fathom whether you have any claims staked out down here or not."

"Interpret your conundrum."

"You and Miss Mayhew."

"Great Scott, no! Not a bit of it."

"Then it's all straight for me to take a hand in the game?"

Norman nodded.

"You've a perfectly clear field; it's open to all-comers, Kit. I assure you I have no monopoly."

"Thanks. I always like to play fair. You see, you and Miss Mayhew have been such a lot together, I thought perhaps —"

"We have been together. It was unavoidable. I'll confess, though, I have resigned myself to my lot quite cheerfully, for she is a mighty nice girl. But there's nothing more to it than that."

"All right. I simply wanted to find out where I stood. Then you'd have no objection to my taking her motoring some?"

"Not the least in the world."

The permission was cordially, even eagerly given.

Things were working out precisely as Norman had hoped.

As for Dora, life immediately doubled in zest. Two adorers were twice as interesting as one. Besides, after being weeks with the circumspect Boston man Kit's contrasting personality had in it the sparkle of champagne. She was a sufficiently

sophisticated girl to enjoy his daring and to appreciate the subtleties of his wit, even though she could not match it in brilliancy. To his graver moods she was driven to admit she had no key; but Kittridge so seldom displayed these in her presence that the lack was not apparent. She rode, golfed, and coquetted with him as she had been wont to do with Norman, and as the day contained only so many hours it naturally followed that in the proportion that her comradeship with him increased her intimacy with Minot lessened.

This unexpected turn of events Mrs. Mayhew surveyed with the utmost disapproval. What midsummer madness was this? Here was an alliance of undreamed of desirability well within reach and just at the crucial moment of clinching it Dora had been distracted into jeopardizing her future prospects by flying off on the tangent of an idle flirtation which might set at nought all that had been accomplished. It was preposterous! What a foolish custom it was to grant incompetent young persons so much freedom, and allow them the liberty of managing such vital matters as their own marriages! Affairs were much better regulated in France. This by-play with Kittridge was perilous in the extreme. It could lead to nothing. Probably the artist had neither money nor position; certainly no standing that could compare with the Minots' social status. How long would Norman re-

main patient under such conditions? Dora was toying with a dangerous situation, and in the meantime the summer was passing. Another month at the most and she and her daughter must be on their way to White Sulphur Springs. Before they went something definite must be done.

Everything was awry!

Left to himself Norman Minot was drifting more and more into the company of pretty Tressie Harlow — a fact easily explained by the lack of other society. The girl was extremely beautiful, and without question persons of such humble connections as the Harlows would do everything in their power to urge on the acquaintance. Day and night Mrs. Mayhew turned the affair over in her mind. What should she do? She dared not talk to Dora. In her present headstrong mood the girl might wheel upon her defiantly and wreck the whole delicately poised relation. This her mother was determined not to permit.

It was only after seeing the romance with Norman Minot reach the brink of disaster that Mrs. Mayhew felt convinced that longer delay would be fatal. Action became imperative. If Dora had not the wisdom to look out for her own interests some one else must guard them for her, and who more rightfully than her mother? She would not speak to her daughter, but would fearlessly address Norman himself.

The case which she built up and subsequently presented to this astounded young man was well prepared and thoroughly convincing.

He had been much with Dora, and by his constant attentions had created a situation which admitted of but one interpretation. Her child's affections had become deeply involved. Still, he had not committed himself. Dora had been at a loss to understand his conduct, and piqued by his neglect had taken up with Robert Kittridge. Mrs. Mayhew did not doubt that Norman's intentions were perfectly honorable; doubtless he had not realized the unhappiness he was causing Dora. And then the woman had wept, declaring that only her mother-love had forced her into speaking. She could not sit back and see Dora break her heart.

As with growing dismay Norman listened to the arraignment, evidence against him constantly accumulated in his mind. Had not his mother entertained this same suspicion; and Kit, too? Unconsciously, unwittingly, he must have given Dora Mayhew far more cause for misunderstanding him than he had dreamed. If so, but one course was open to him. Chivalry forbade that he should voice the truth. For his stupidity he must pay the price. He must ask the girl to marry him.

She was not at all the woman he desired for a wife. For years he had looked forward to making this single choice of his life a wise one. And now,

trapped and defenceless, against both his will and his judgment, he was to be forced into a union which would embody none of the principles for which he stood. The irony of it caused him to smile bitterly.

To doubt Mrs. Mayhew's sincerity did not occur to him. However crude she might be, the mother element in all women was genuine, he told himself.

Therefore he faced her accusations with as much equanimity as he was able; pleaded diffidence as the cause for his delay; and gave his word that at least in so far as he was concerned the matter should promptly be brought to a climax.

With a gasp of relief the diplomat then sought her daughter. She knew well that to manage Dora would be no such easy task; nor did it prove so.

The girl was sitting before her mirror when her mother entered the room and without introduction the elder woman plunged at once into her subject.

"I've just been talking with Norman Minot, Dora."

Dora shrugged her shoulders indifferently and went on brushing out her hair.

"He thinks you have not treated him at all fairly," went on Mrs. Mayhew impressively.

"Did he say that?"

"That and a great deal more," was the instant reply. "He demands that you come to some de-

cision as to whether you mean to marry him or not."

"He has never asked me to marry him."

"He's going to."

"How do you know?"

"He told me so just now. You'll have to have an answer ready."

"My answer is ready."

"You'll accept him, of course."

"Why *of course,* Mother?"

"Why — because he has everything you want to marry — money, position, family —"

The room was tensely still.

"Well?" demanded the mother after the silence had become intolerable.

"I told you I had my answer ready."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm not going to marry Norman Minot."

"Why not?"

"A thousand reasons; chiefly because I do not love him. I —"

"You need not go on," cut in her mother angrily. "You are not accepting him because you have some romantic notion in your head about this Mr. Kittridge. The way you've been carrying on with that man is disgraceful — a penniless artist with neither position nor reputation! Who is he? Has anyone ever heard of him or his people? He's a social nobody; a roué who has sown his wild oats, and made every woman he has met his prey. It is easy

enough to see what he is. He has simply flirted with you as he has with a score of others; and you have been fool enough to take his attentions seriously, and in exchange for them throw over a match with a man who is head and shoulders above him, and far beyond anything you could have expected to capture. Any girl you know would envy you Norman Minot, and be thankful to get him. A marriage with him would give you the entrée into a social set we never could have reached any other way. It would mean everything to us. You can't afford to toss such a chance aside. You'll never get another to equal it, mark my words. You're at the turning of the ways. You can't coquette with him any longer. He is in earnest. What are you going to do? On the one hand you have Minot — a sure thing; on the other this Kittridge who so far as I can find out has never asked you to marry him, and who probably has not the remotest intention of doing so. Has he said anything to you yet?"

Dora did not reply.

"Has he?"

The girl shook her head.

"No."

"And never will, in my opinion," came triumphantly from her mother. "He isn't the marrying sort. He's having too good a time as he is. Don't be an idiot, Dora. I know more about such things

than you do. Kittridge is no sort of a match for you, even if you could land him — which I very seriously doubt. And while you're dallying with him you'll lose Mr. Minot. It is for you to decide. All is if you refuse Norman Minot and marry this artist I wash my hands of you. You seem to have forgotten that the fortune your father left you, and which was to come to you on your marriage, is yours only on the condition that you marry with my consent."

Dora started.

Mrs. Mayhew noted the movement with satisfaction.

"With my consent," she repeated. "I shall never give my consent to a marriage between you and Mr. Kittridge, never! If you marry Norman Minot, the legacy shall be paid, and you will be one of the richest girls in the country. With his ancestry and position, and your money there'll be nothing you can't do. You shall have a royal wedding, and the most beautiful trousseau I can pick out. Think it over well."

Unlucky Dora!

She did think it over well.

To her native worldliness was linked a background of sordid ideals inculcated into her since childhood by her mother. From her little flight into a realm of better things she came back to the mundane standards to which she had been born and

sacrificed on the pyre of ambition her girlish heart.

Hence it followed that when Norman met Kit on the lawn the next day he observed with a self-consciousness he struggled to stifle:

"A while ago, Kit, you put a very personal question to me. The answer I gave you at that time was quite honest. But since then a lot has happened, and it is only right to tell you that the affair does not now stand at all as it did then."

He hesitated, Kittridge's keen scrutiny causing him to falter.

"In fact," he continued, making a desperate effort to appear at his ease, "well, to cut a long story short, I am to marry Miss Mayhew."

"What!" ejaculated Kit, incredulously.

"We're to be married, Miss Mayhew and I."

"You've asked her already?"

"Yes."

"And she —" came sceptically from Kit.

"Yes; we shall announce the engagement right away."

A wave of brick-red color crept up the artist's cheek, suffusing his face.

Then his hand shot out, and he exclaimed imperturbably:

"Congratulations, old fellow. Miss Mayhew is one girl in a hundred. You are a lucky beggar, Norman."

"I am indeed."

But before the steady gaze of his friend Norman's eyes fell.

Something in Kit's glance disconcerted him.

Suddenly he realized that the call had come for him to take up the rôle which for the remainder of his lifetime he must portray.

He wondered with trepidation whether he possessed sufficient talent to present the part convincingly.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DEFEAT OF THE HURDLER

ALONE in his room that night Norman Minot confronted the tangle of circumstances that enmeshed him.

His freedom was gone.

With the passage of a few short hours he had been made captive and bound in chains never to be broken. All his life he had looked forward to his marriage as the realization of a throng of dreams, the reward for years of hard and unremitting toil; it was to have been the crown of his career, a service to his race, a guerdon for upright living. Had he not with deepest reverence held it ever in view? And now the great event had come — and what was it? A fiasco; a mockery that forced him out of his habitual honesty, making of him a mummer who must for the remainder of his life play the hypocrite — he, Norman Minot, who never before had shrunk from having the searchlight of truth turned upon his conduct!

To be made a puppet! To masquerade, to deceive day after day, year after year! The pity of it!

Furthermore, there was Dora.

How unfair, how cruel this counterfeiting was to her! Whatever his feeling toward her she was giving him her all, the best she had to give — a signal honor for any woman to bestow upon any man. And in return what was he offering? Liking, respect, friendship, but not love. A grossly unequal exchange it was. Could the bargain have been presented frankly, and Dora have understood and accepted it at its true value, it would even then have been a contract unworthy enough; nevertheless it could at least have boasted the virtue of being fair. Yet he shrank from translating such a relation into crude business terms; to tell a woman one did not love her, especially when she had been given to understand to the contrary, was a brutal course that transgressed every code he had been brought up to entertain in regard to womanhood. Ruthlessly he rejected it as impossible.

What a blind fool he had been, and how his vanity smarted!

To think that for all time he must pay the penalty for his lack of insight — he, a lawyer, whose business it was to study and to solve the enigmas of human nature. Moreover, there was no one to whom he could unburden his heart. The cross of his bitter disappointment he must bear alone. Even betwixt him and his mother the insurmountable barrier of silence must ever remain. Did not loyalty to Dora prevent his explaining, his pride

would have refused him utterance. And after all suppose he were cad enough to acquaint his mother with the wretched truth, what comfort could she offer? She could only remind him that he had rejected her warning, and to words of this tenor he was in no mood to listen. Did he not recognize only too keenly his dull-wittedness?

As he thus railed against himself and against Fate he was in the meantime conscious of an ever recurring thought of Tressie Harlow. What was the indefinable emotion which like a current from the wells of his being went out toward this girl? Of late they had been much together, and a strange bond that had had its root in the slight beginnings of pity, admiration, and interest, had strengthened into a relation defying analysis. It was not of the head, although through the medium of literature it partook of the intellectual, nor was it of the heart for the two had never explored that forbidden province; yet in each of these realms it had a share. But it was something more, something so vital that it leaped the chasms of birth, education, environment. Whatever it was it had become very dear to him, and the realization that henceforth it must cease added no little to his bitterness. The decree was like forbidding water to the thirsty.

Would Tressie, when she heard the tidings, look with her great brown eyes into his soul as Kit had done?

What would she think?

Then there was his mother!

How would she regard the daughter-in-law who would in future live in the old Boston home and eventually become its mistress? Often they had spent hours castle-building; discussing together what it would mean to have in her life the treasure she had been denied — a daughter. Her son's marriage was an event she had schooled herself to meet with all the sweetness and unselfishness of her nature. Despite the pang that came with surrendering her boy into other hands she would not have had it otherwise. She longed to have Norman's days enriched by the possession of wife and children, and so great was her love that it swept aside every egoistic consideration and left only his welfare uppermost. Even under ideal conditions Norman understood, however, the sacrifice such altruism entailed. Now that sacrifice became tragedy — a tragedy, too, that could neither be alleviated nor explained away. That there could be no real companionship between her and Dora he knew well. Their very fundamentals were at variance. His mother would put a brave front on the matter, but she would be overwhelmingly disappointed.

Alas, there was no help for it.

He must face the inevitable, carry himself jauntily, and do everything in his power to make happy the woman who had put her future into his

keeping. That Dora loved him he had no reason to doubt. Had she not owned it? It was true he had missed in her surrender the ecstasy he had always fancied the moment would contain; but doubtless this was his own fault. He had refused to lie. It had been a shamelessly prosaic spectacle, this big scene of his life. As the travesty now came before his mind so complete was its transparency it seemed incredible Dora should not have questioned its genuineness. He had been self-contained to the borderland of coldness; but so, too, he now recalled had Dora. Had they been a world-worn, middle-aged, jaded couple accepting the alliance as a last resort from ennui they could not have been less ardent.

Moodily he paced the floor.

Against the window he could hear the rhythm of the rain, and from the distance the moaning inland echoes of the surf tumbling in over the Bar.

They were bitter hours — those that Norman Minot fought out alone that night.

But with the morning an intrepid conqueror met the day.

Except that Mrs. Mayhew adopted toward his mother a jarring familiarity, and that Kit persistently took himself off sketching, all went as before. Norman hoped eagerly that after a little the novelty of the event would wear away, and the life at Wilton swing back into its normal grooves. Be-

fore long he must get Kit to join him and Dora at golf as usual, for the long tête-à-têtes with his fiancée he found extremely taxing. Kit was a prop. Things went easier when he was by.

Out of decency the engagement must, of course, be announced to the Harlows — or at least to Deborah, and she be left to spread the news to the remainder of her family. By that means he would avoid telling Tressie himself. Not that there was any reason in the world why he should shrink from telling Tressie. Their relation had been purely impersonal. However, the other course was easier, and in it he was cowardly enough to seek escape. That he should have sunk into being such a craven! Once he would have turned white even at the empty imputation of fear. Now he accepted the stigma along with the other despicable accusations he merited.

Truly the honor of his house had fallen and its glory, once the inspiration of his life, had descended into the dust!

The days that followed were a nightmare to Norman. They were resonant with eager plans on Mrs. Mayhew's part for an early marriage; with the chatter of gowns, modistes, and social functions. In these councils his mother was obliged to participate, joining in the discussions with a patience and an assumed interest that was heartbreaking to witness.

As for Dora, like some theatrical star whose manager bears the onerousness of all details she sat apart, totally disregarding the arrangements that completely engrossed her mother. At times she seemed even to take no interest in the things that so nearly concerned her. She had become graver, more subdued; and the spontaneity that had made their old comradeship so delightful had vanished. Sometimes Norman detected in her eyes a shadow he could not interpret. When it came he was wont to charge himself with some neglect, and redouble his attentions. Perhaps after all, he told himself, it was only natural that a girl who was for the first time face to face with the graver issues of life should become more serious. Thus mistaking for the depths the shallows he assuaged his misgivings.

Throughout these trying hours it was the ocean that was his great solace.

Upon its breast, with Nathan or Kit for companions, he would watch the shore with its complexities recede into a haze, and in the immeasurable tract of blue would for an interval forget the tragedies that lay behind him. But there was always the coming back to the prison-house, either through the radiant glow of noontide or the burning waters of a blood-red sunset.

Somehow, too, Nate seemed different now-a-days, and so did Kit.

Whether they had really changed, or whether the

variation was only a reaction from his own gloomy imaginings he could not tell. Nate's personality had dulled to greyness, the sparkle in it being entirely extinguished. In Kit the change was more subtle, and less easy to define. He was quite as friendly, quite as witty as of yore; but there was a sting in his jests, and he was preoccupied. When taxed with this absence of mind he would only laugh, and explain that he was painting hard, and thinking out his color schemes.

Indeed, this argument was to all appearances true for, overcoming Deborah's objections, the artist had begun a portrait of Tressie, in the execution of which he was much absorbed. The picture, he asserted, was for the fall exhibit. His conception showed the girl buoyant and expectant, her feet kissing the sand; the wonder of the ocean behind her; and a shell murmuring its mystic music into her ear. He was going to call the fancy "Mysteries," he said.

With an uneasiness Norman could not justify he noticed that the work took the two away from the house a good part of the time. This was a fortunate happening, he reasoned, since it served to keep Tressie out of his path, and prevented him from thinking too much about her. Nevertheless, sound as was this logic it failed to be borne out by fact. Tressie absent was in his mind more than ever she had been when present. He found himself angry at

Kit for undertaking the portrait; annoyed at Tressie for lending her aid to it; vexed with Deborah for permitting it to be painted. So keen did this resentment become, and so poignantly did it rasp his nerves that twice he caught himself on the verge of venting his irritation on the blameless Dora.

It was at about this time that to his surprise he began to detect in her an answering irascibility. This condition became more aggravated until at length the structure of their relation tottered on the very edge of collapse. What might have happened is uncertain had not Mrs. Mayhew come forward just at the juncture and announced one morning that she had received a telegram calling her home.

"Such a pity, my dear Norman, to break up this perfect summer, isn't it? But alas, everything — even the most beautiful things — must have their end. We cannot dwell in Arcadia forever! And after all you and Dora are so soon to be together for a lifetime that a few short months will count as nothing." She touched the telegram in her hand. "What merciless fellows lawyers are! They have no consideration for the pangs of young lovers. We must, however, forgive the tyrants, I suppose, since they are of your kin."

This explanation elaborately and somewhat self-consciously delivered, Mrs. Mayhew was in the maddest haste to be gone. She could not pack fast enough. Even Dora herself shared her mother's

eagerness to leave Wilton, and the next day saw the great trunks bumped down the steep staircase; Frou-frou bundled into his travelling-basket; and the mother and daughter on their western way.

Norman accompanied them as far as Boston, and afterward telegraphed that henceforth important business would detain him in town and that he should not return to the Cape. Accordingly Mrs. Minot also packed up and betook herself to the city to join her boy.

Nathan rubbed his hands.

"We certainly are gettin' back to normal!" he exulted. "When this painter chap goes won't I raise a hallelujah? I'm dead sick of bein' crowded out of my own chairs, an' eatin' lukewarm victuals off the corner of the kitchen table."

The painter chap, however, exhibited not the slightest sign of departing. On the contrary he purposed, to all appearances, to remain indefinitely. He liked Wilton, he said; and furthermore he had the portrait to finish. Hence, although it was now September, he still lingered on.

"But if I stay, Miss Deborah, I do not mean to sit alone in the dining-room and devour my meals in solitude," he affirmed. "Nor shall I want the monopoly of the sitting-room. I wish you to come back to your regular mode of living and simply allow me to be one of the family."

At first Deborah demurred.

Such an arrangement was not fitting.

Notwithstanding her protests, in the end Kit prevailed.

He was a masterful fellow, with a will as unyielding as Deborah's own; furthermore, he was paying generously to have his way, and for financial reasons it was prudent to humor him. Accordingly the homestead at the ocean's brink resumed its former routine and to all outward appearances its customary serenity.

But was it in reality as serene as before the foot of the intruder had crossed its threshold?

As Tressie stood alone in her moonlit chamber, and amid the stillness looked out upon the ruffled, gold-touched surface of the sea two men came before her vision. One was the knightly presence of Norman Minot — chivalrous, reverent, calling into harmony all the warring elements of her many-sided character; the other was Kittridge — fascinating, compelling, rousing to a fury every latent impulse of her passionate nature. To which should she own fealty? To the dreams Norman had created within her, and left her to foster; or to the beckonings of Kittridge, urging her she knew not whither?

Norman had tossed her aside and left her without even the grace of a farewell; but Kit was daily at her side, making his virile presence felt in everything she thought or did. There was no escaping

him. Nor did she wholly desire to escape. Here was one who like herself delighted in the delicate tints of a shell; who saw behind the silver-edged clouds vistas of beauty; who echoed the sea's triumphant Te Deum, or sobbed in tune with its haunting Miserere. With these finer chords of the man's nature she vibrated in complete unity. There was, however, another note in Robert Kittridge's character to which she also vibrated. What it was she could not have defined. It was as darkness to light; as the beating tempest to the calm sea; a pulsating, turbulent force whose domination over her was strengthening daily.

Would her feeling toward Norman prove powerful enough to keep her steadfast against the ever-increasing spell of Kittridge's personality, she asked herself fearfully.

## CHAPTER XV

### TEMPTATION

IMPORTANT as were Norman Minot's own concerns, had he realized to the full the perilousness of Tressie's position he undoubtedly would have abandoned every other interest, and like Lohengrin flying to the defense of Elsa, he would have sped to give her succour.

For the combat raging in the seemingly tranquil little fishing town was indeed a crucial one.

Kit's pride, like his own, was smarting from the blow of a woman's hand.

By some prank of Fate the artist had roamed the world only to confront in the isolated hamlet of Wilton the affinity at whose feet he was compelled to lay down the laurels of his genius. Dora Mayhew, it is true, was not at all the type of girl he would in cold blood have pictured as the being to whom he had fancied himself offering his fortunes. In fact, so many women had flitted before Kit's vision that they had become blurred until he could not have defined just what was the composite he desired for a wife. To choose one woman from out all the world was a stupendous lottery. He had

shrunk so long from binding himself that of late he had about come to the conclusion that freedom was perhaps better than any marriage at all.

It was just as this decision had crystallized that he had met Dora — pretty but not beautiful, interesting but not brilliant. Who can explain the capricious and inconsistent laws that draw two persons together? Despite her attraction for him he nevertheless cherished no illusions regarding her. She was the product of the conventional life he scorned; a girl perfectly groomed, faultlessly attired, of whose appearance a man might justly feel proud. With her posteresque charm she was both decorative and striking, a capital foil for a clever man. Moreover she had a provokingly knowing little manner, very alluring, the piquancy of standing poised on the edge of the risqué world he knew, and yet of not being of it. Whatever his own standards of living he should demand a wife whom he could trust, and whose principles he could respect. Yet he was driven to admit with a smile whimsical and not altogether disapproving, that the touch of Dora's feet upon the earth was sufficiently firm to render congenial to her the Bohemian and sophisticated world in which he moved. All this made for a unity in tastes that was very gratifying. In addition to this fundamental asset there were glints of fire in the girl's nature that promised much, and a certain homage and appreciа-

tion for his work highly desirable in any wife he should select. In fairness to Kit it is but just to state that the fact of her wealth followed rather than led these many considerations; still, he was politic enough not to be entirely able to lose sight of the incident that Dora's fortune would also be an extremely useful accessory to the career of a rising young artist.

In all his life he had never before thought seriously of asking a woman to marry him. To fetter one's self to the conventionalities and obligations attendant upon matrimony was intensely repugnant to a person of his freedom-loving character. But he was older now. He had seen the world and had his fling, and perhaps for the sake of his own advancement it was as well that he turned his mind to the serious business of building up his artistic reputation. *"For to admire, for to see, for to behold this world so wide"* was an excellent pastime, but it could not be man's endless mission. He would deafen his ears to the siren callings of the wanderlust, and like an irreproachable Benedict would marry Dora Mayhew and settle down.

With Kit, to decide was to act, and to act swiftly.

Ardently he had begun his wooing.

To his suit Dora had responded with all the warmth a modest girl could display.

The prize was almost within his hand when sud-

denly it had been wrested from his grasp, and his fingers had closed on empty air.

Norman Minot, the friend to whom he had (or thought he had) confided his plans, and who had appeared to endorse his cause with fervor, had recoiled upon him with the astounding tidings that the jewel Kit had coveted had become his. The news was incredible. To be sure it was not actual treachery, for both men had an equal right to enter the lists for Dora's favor; nevertheless, it showed a deplorable lack of the frankness Kit himself had displayed toward his chum. The more the artist reflected on the enigma the less willing he was to believe that Norman had from the first entertained the intention of winning Dora, and had been playing a two-faced game; Minot was too decent for that. Probably he had been tempted into the alliance for the money. Human nature Kit had found woefully rotten, and every man had his weak side. But who would have suspected such sordidness in a person of Norman's principles and ideals? It was grievously disappointing! Evidently there was no such thing in the universe as sterling high-mindedness. When it came to the test all men, no matter what their code, had an equal greed for gain — even Norman Minot.

Kit shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

For Dora there was not even this miserable shred

of an excuse. She was absolutely culpable, having answered smile with smile, while secretly amusing herself at his expense. He had made his intentions so unmistakable that to overlook her duplicity on the ground of a want of understanding was impossible. She was merely a shallow coquette who had accepted his attentions from sheer vanity, in reality caring nothing about him.

Never before had he been so deceived.

To have his faith in one of his best friends shattered was a tremendous blow.

As to the girl — that was his own fault; he should have known enough by this time not to expect anything better of womankind.

His lip curled.

In his opinion the engagement was not a thing to be proud of from any standpoint; and it seemed as if Norman, at least, appreciated this fact; for notwithstanding his success he had been sheepish and embarrassed ever since his triumph had been acclaimed.

Well, it was useless to harbor regrets. Kit resolved he would banish the entire affair from his thoughts. Henceforth he would put his trust neither in man nor woman. Instead he would focus all his energy on his art from which he was sorry he had ever permitted it to wander. Accordingly he did the thing which from the moment of his coming to Wilton he had been tempted to do,

and yet had stubbornly resisted doing. He began a portrait of Tressie Harlow.

The girl's unusual beauty had haunted him from the instant he had first seen her. Not only had she perfection of feature and coloring, but she was a tormenting blend of childhood and womanhood, radiating the innocence of the unawakened. Her exquisitely modelled head; the well-chiselled nose, mouth, and chin; the delicately arching brows, all appealed to the artist's discrimination. Then there was in addition the hair, hazel yet glowing to bronze in a strong light; and the flawless skin beneath which surged tints of carmine. The ever changing expression of the face had fascinated him from the beginning. Now it was mischievous with the witching charm of a woodland sprite; now it melted into the mistiness of the dreamer. What was the child — elf, nymph, or mystic? Had she escaped from some fairy ring and come dancing her way into the realm of real things; or did the velvet depths of her eyes hold in them a prophetic vision visible to herself alone? Kit could not tell. Sometimes she seemed a poet ensnared in the prose of the world who, like the seers of old, followed a star.

Whatever her ilk she unquestionably possessed all that was fair in woman. But because the artist knew his own nature, and through it had some perception of Tressie's, he had up to now avoided her. She was a sweet, ignorant creature; the daughter of

simple and honest folk who had been kind to him; and into whose home, through the intercession of Norman Minot, he had been admitted. To trifle even to a slight extent with the peace of mind of this beautiful child with her rainbow-hued nature would be unworthy. It was easy enough for a man of his understanding to see that the girl was temperamental, intense in her loves, responsive to every phase of beauty, and with only a flimsy armour against the shafts of the world's evil. For himself he had no fears; but out of loyalty to his best ideals of womanhood he would not permit himself to cross her path. Why expose tinder to flame?

Kit could hold a tense rein on himself when he so elected, and in the present instance he did so elect.

All this, however, was before Dora had made a jest of him.

Now the bonds of restraint had been shattered.

A woman had flouted and deceived him, making a toy of all that was best in his soul. He had not been spared. Why should he spare another? Tressie Harlow could not forever remain cut off from the great throbbing tide of life. Together with the other women that peopled the earth she must mingle with the throng and take her chance. The cup that her face proclaimed she must eventually drain to the dregs she must taste sometime. Her fate was not to skim the heights or the depths;

with bleeding feet she would toil up the winding path to the glory of the mountain-peaks; and grope her way through the blackness of suffering into the abysses of pain. To such a destiny are some women fore-ordained. Like the harp through which the wind sighs they are born to breathe out through their being every trembling emotion of their hearts.

So reasoned Robert Kittridge in the first bitterness of his humiliation and disappointment.

Then, his cynicism spent, his better angel made her presence felt.

Why premeditate evil?

Instead why not for the glorification of art paint a beautiful portrait of a beautiful girl without the thought of harm shadowing his canvas? Forewarned was forearmed. With the advantage of years, and a knowledge of humankind to protect him there could be no chance of disaster; he would be perfectly able not only to shelter himself but Tressie from harm.

This belief formulated, Kit promptly set himself to securing a large canvas; renting an untenanted fishing shack near the shore which should serve as a studio; and winning Deborah's consent that the project be undertaken. Enthusiastically he sketched in his exquisite conception. Even its crude outlines were fascinating. The picture grew. He became bound up in his task, his artist's soul losing

itself in the rapture of the doing. With the zest of work forgetfulness with its healing touch brought peace to his wounded spirit. Day after day as the waves murmured their monotonous rhythm outside he and Tressie spent long hours in the rude studio, and so intent did Kit become that often the lapping of the water was the only sound heard in the room.

Slowly the portrait took form, and as the beauty of his subject leaped upon the canvas the artist was in a frenzy of exhilaration. Never had he done anything to equal this. How marvellous were the lights on the hair and shoulder! How dainty the head with its half-listening, half-expectant pose!

Nevertheless beautiful as was the copy it but faintly approached the loveliness of the original. Kit was forced to admit that. The delicate tints of the flesh, the vermilion of the parted lips defied his skill. If he could only capture those elusive colorings! On he toiled feverishly, persistently. But the gleam he pursued always escaped him. He could catch its radiance, the flash of its glinting shadows; but the translucent thing itself flickered ever beyond his reach as does the rainbow beyond the grasp of the eager child.

A reaction from his ecstasy followed.

He became disheartened.

One day when he had worked for a long time only to fail in mixing a desired tint he tossed his palette

from him, and obliterating with ruthless knife his afternoon's toil strode swiftly to the other side of the room.

"Tressie! Tressie!" he cried. "Do you know you are the most beautiful thing in God's world? That you tantalize, exasperate, baffle me?"

The words when framed had simply been a vent for his irritation. But as they rushed from his lips touched with the vehemence of mingled admiration and anger their effect became electrical. A spark within him flashed into fire and before he sensed what he was doing he had caught the girl in his arms and was kissing her passionately.

Then all quivering, he freed her, a great shame surging over him.

"Forgive me, child; forgive me!" he murmured brokenly. "I was mad, Tressie — mad!"

Chagrined, he returned to his easel and resolutely picked up his discarded colors. But the enchantment of his artistry was undone. Between him and his canvas came the fragrance of the hair he struggled to paint, the soft touch of the lips he fashioned with unsteady brush. Furtively he could see that Tressie, too, had lost control of herself. Trembling and with downcast eyes she fought to hold her pose. It was useless to go on with the picture that day, or in fact any day until the balance of their relation should be restored. Some means must be found to sweep aside the memory of

this unlucky incident and destroy the barrier of self-consciousness that separated them.

Moodily he looked past his model toward the great billowing deep behind her, casting about for a remedy.

The boat!

If he could but get Tressie into the boat all else would be forgotten.

"Tressie," he called, "suppose we give up work for today. I am not myself. You are tired and so am I. Let us put everything else aside and go for a sail in the *Sylph*."

An expression of relief flashed into the girl's eyes.

"Oh, I'd love to."

Then her brow instantly clouded and she added:

"I am afraid, though, we can't today. Uncle Nate has gone to Belleport to see about some new fish-weirs."

"But we do not need him. Surely with my help you can sail the boat alone. You have often done it, you know, even when your uncle was by."

"Yes. But I've never really been out without him."

"I can't see what difference that makes," Kit returned impatiently. "Of course you would not think of going entirely by yourself; the sail would be much too heavy for you to handle. But with me aboard why is it necessary for you to have your uncle also?"

"I — I — don't know."

She glanced through the door.

Filmy clouds veiled the sun and dulled the ocean to a tossing reach of green that fretted invitingly against the sides of the boats anchored nearby. About the prow of the *Sylph* she could catch the play of transparent emerald lights. The blood was still coursing riotously through her veins, and she longed for the cooling peace of the sea's breath, the sympathy of its soothing silence.

Surely her uncle would not begrudge her this escape from her fevered and terrifying mood! Had he ever refused her anything she had asked?

"I suppose we might go for a little while," she faltered uncertainly. "It can do no harm."

Almost before she realized it she found herself in the yawl — its canvas filling, and its rudder answering to the touch of her hand. Every shadow of resistance had now vanished. With the Channel stretching before her like the highway into paradise she made her way through its treacherous shoals and steered for the open sea.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE VIGIL

LATE that afternoon Nathan returned from Belleport.

A fog constantly increasing in density had for the last hour been drifting in from the sea, and his clothing was heavy with moisture.

As he closed the door the genial warmth of the kitchen greeted him and he smiled across the room to Deborah who was busy at the table preparing supper.

"Well, if it ain't good to get in out of the wet!" he exclaimed. "It's so thick outside you could cut it with a knife. But for Zenas Henry's horse knowin' the way I don't believe we'd 'a' got home at all. That fog-bank's been hangin' out there since mornin', only needin' a puff of wind to blow it in shore."

Wriggling out of his coat he spread it on a chair before the fire.

"Where's Tressie?" he asked.

"Down at the shack with Mr. Kittridge."

"Still a-workin' on that picture? Lord! What

on earth keeps that feller so long? I'll bet I could finish it up in half the time."

"I reckon it pays to spend time on paintin'. Judgin' from what work of yours I've seen I —" she broke off, glancing suggestively at the boards beneath her feet.

"Now don't go throwin' this kitchen floor in my face again, Deborah," Nate protested peevishly. "Ain't I said already the color warn't never right?"

Deborah subsided into silence.

If Nate was conscious of his error and did not forget it that was all that was necessary.

"Did you get your fish-nets?" she inquired after a few moments' pause.

"Yes, we brought 'em home in the wagon. I left 'em in the entry."

He went through into the sitting-room where, lowering the hanging lamp suspended in the centre of the ceiling, he sat down in its circle of light to read the paper.

"Don't it seem to you Tressie ought to be gettin' back?" he called presently.

"'Tain't supper time yet."

"But it's gettin' so dark an' wet."

Going to the window he wiped the moisture from the small square pane and looked down the harbor road.

"You can't see your hand before you," he remarked.

"Mr. Kittridge is with her."

"I 'spose so. I reckon they're all right."

Once more he seated himself and took up the paper.

To the loud ticking of the clock a half-hour passed.

"Where do you figger that child can be, Deborah?" he called again. "Ain't it 'most six?"

"Quarter of."

"She'd oughter be here."

"Now don't go fussin' an' fumin' 'bout Tressie, Nathan," Deborah replied. "There's fifteen good minutes yet before supper. She'll turn up all right. Even if she got to dreamin' somewheres Mr. Kittridge would bring her home. He's never late to meals."

Nate, however, was not satisfied.

Still grumbling, he meandered into the kitchen, where he wandered uneasily about.

He straightened the door-mat; pushed the clock further back on the shelf; gave the woodbox a kick with his foot; and then reached across the table to raise the window-shade. It was while engaged in this latter feat that his sleeve brushed a pitcher of milk, and over it went.

"Now only see what you've done, Nathan Harlow!" cried Deborah, springing forward with a cloth. "If you ain't everlastingly rockin' a funeral! I do wish you wouldn't come meddlin' an'

reformin' round this kitchen. Why don't you go in an' set down 'til supper's ready?"

"I didn't mean —"

"That's all very well; I 'spose you didn't. But do get out from under foot now an' give me leeway to clear up this mess. All that milk wasted! An' we were short of milk, too. I declare, it's a shame. One man can make more work in ten seconds than a woman can clean up in an hour."

Hastily Nate retreated.

The clock struck six.

He fidgetted about, awaiting some summons from Deborah; but she did not speak.

"Warn't that six o'clock?" he inquired at last, unable to contain himself longer.

"You heard it strike, didn't you?"

"I — I — kinder thought mebbe I did."

Deborah deigned no reply.

"They're late, ain't they?"

"It looks like it."

He got up and came to the threshold separating the rooms.

"'Tain't likely they're paintin' down to that shanty now."

Deborah greased her smoking griddle, and spooned out of the bowl in her a hand a mass of creamy batter. It dropped upon the spider with a resonant sizzle.

"I don't think anything of that picture notion

anyway," fretted Nathan. "It's only keepin' that Kittridge round here, an' what does it amount to?"

"It's amountin' to a good deal of money," came grimly from his sister.

"Money, money! I'm sick of thinkin' money all the time."

"Mebbe if you'd thought it a little more in the past you wouldn't have to be thinkin' of it so much now."

Nate winced.

"Well, you certainly must 'a' made enough this summer to do us for some time. With four boarders, an' the dog, an' the automobile —"

He stopped abruptly.

"You don't 'spose they've gone out in that automobile, do you?" he questioned.

"How should I know?"

"I'm goin' to see if it's there."

Slipping into his oilskins, he lighted a lantern.

"What do you want to go to all that trouble for, Nathan?" protested Deborah wearily. "Like as not they'll be here before you get back."

But Nathan was not to be deterred.

"He's silly as a hen with one chick about Tressie," muttered the woman after he had gone. "I wish, though, they were back. I can't devise what's keepin' 'em."

She put the covered dish of pancakes in the oven.

"They'll be soggy an' worthless," she mused

aloud. "It's dretful funny they don't come. Mr. Kittridge ain't ever been late before."

When Nate returned she was busy stirring up more batter.

Peeling off his wet coat he started to enter the kitchen.

"Wipe your feet! Wipe your feet!" commanded Deborah tartly over her shoulder. "Ain't it bad enough to spill milk all over the floor, without trackin' mud from one end of the house to the other?"

Meekly the culprit withdrew to the door-mat.

"It's black as your hat outside," he ventured as he rubbed his boots. "The foghorn on the Shoals is belchin' like mad. Where do you 'spose they are?"

"How do I know, Nathan? Don't keep askin' me that over an' over," retorted Deborah impatiently. "Come, you better sit down an' eat your supper. That'll give you somethin' to do."

"But I ain't hungry."

"No matter. Six o'clock's the hour when all Christian folks eat whether they're hungry or not. I believe I'll eat mine, too, an' then I can get our dishes out of the way before they come."

Without more words they seated themselves at the kitchen table.

Amid the stillness of the room the sinister sound of the distant horn was quite audible.

"It'll be a bad night outside presently. "I reckon John Bart He always gets het up with worry a fog."

Toying aimlessly with the food gulped down the cup of hot tea at he rose and went into the hall.

"Where you goin'?" demanded

"I've a notion to go down to th a look around."

This time she did not dub the p stead she replied:

"Mebbe 'twould be just as well

Had she scoffed at the suggesti been reassuring. Her implied a increased the man's anxiety.

"You don't imagine anythin 'em?" he faltered.

"What could happen?"

"I dunno," was the vague answe 'a' lost their way, it's so thick."

"'Tain't likely."

"I 'spose not. Mr. Kittridge d gettin' a lantern, but I guess he di it."

Feverishly he buttoned up his c

When his hand was on the lat door he wheeled and faced his sist

"If that Kittridge has let an

Tressie, I'll kill him," he asserted with ominous quietness.

"Nathan!"

"I'd do it in a minute."

His face was white, and the lips were pressed together with solemn determination.

"But — but — what could he do?" quavered Deborah, terrified by his earnestness.

"Do? What could any brute of a man do to a helpless girl? I tell you 'twarn't no sort of a scheme lettin' these strangers come here, anyway — money or no money. What did we know about 'em? Have you any proof this man Kittridge warn't a villain from the beginnin'? I told you in the first place you were takin' a lot on your shoulders to do it, an' I think so still; so does everyone else in this town."

With a spirited bang of the door he went out.

Deborah rose from the table.

Her face had become very grave.

She went to the window.

The faint arc of light from Nate's lantern moved slowly down the path and melted into the night, leaving a pall of blackness behind it.

"I can't imagine where they can be," she observed for the hundredth time. "'Tain't likely anything can have happened. My, but it's foggy! Mebbe they got mixed up comin' home, an' couldn't find the road."

She pushed the shade up higher and began to clear the table.

She moved slowly, however, and with the uncertainty of one whose mind is elsewhere.

"I don't know after all but I was foolish to let that Kittridge feller start that picture of Tressie. It's only throwin' 'em together a lot. Still, if he hadn't got interested doin' it he'd 'a' gone home long ago, an' we'd 'a' been a heap of money out. He's the best payin' boarder of the lot."

She put the dishes into the sink.

"'Twas true enough, though, what Nathan said. We don't know much about him. He's lived in Paris, they say, an' of course everybody knows Paris is enough of a Sodom and Gomorrah to turn anybody wicked even if they did no more than spend a day there."

Her face clouded into a frown.

"I ought never to have took any men boarders, I guess," she murmured irritably. "Men ain't got no business bein' in the world anyhow. Wherever they go it's nothin' but trouble, trouble, trouble! I'm sorry I ever let a man speak to Tressie — flighty little thing! But I did think she seemed to be steadyin' down so there warn't no call to worry about her. It's a shame she warn't born plain. Then I wouldn't have had to give her a thought."

Absently she dried the dishes.

"It's nonsense thinkin' anythin' could have hap-

pened," she declared aloud. "Still, I wish Nathan was back."

As she crossed into the pantry to set the cups and plates on the shelf she raised that curtain and peered out.

The clock struck seven.

"I'm afraid it's no use to save supper any longer."

She stood regarding the table thoughtfully.

"Nathan's certainly been gone an awful while. I hope to mercy he ain't found anything wrong."

The hands with which she removed the untasted supper trembled.

"If any harm should come to Tressie, I believe he'd die. The girl's more to him than anything else in the world. 'Spose that Kittridge had dared —" she shut her lips on the words. "Nathan would kill him — he'd kill him, sure's I'm standin' here."

A quiver passed through her frame.

"I oughtn't to have let him go down to that shack alone," she muttered under her breath.

There was a scraping at the door.

She leaped to lift the latch.

It was Nathan.

"Well," he demanded eagerly, "have they come?"

"No. Warn't they there?"

"No."

This time she helped him off with his dripping coat, and taking the lantern, blew it out.

From the corner of her eye she scanned his drawn face.

"No, the shanty was closed tight as a drum, an' padlocked on the outside," he added as if he was too fatigued to speak. "I tried to get in, but I couldn't."

In the lamplight his pallor was ghastly.

"Sit down by the stove an' dry off, Nathan."

"It don't matter about me."

"Yes, it does."

"I couldn't sit down, anyway."

Speechlessly he paced the room.

"I can't see where they could 'a' went to," he burst out at last. "If that damned automobile was gone I'd have somethin' to go by; but it ain't. They couldn't have wandered up the bluff, an' walked off the edge in the dark; there warn't nothin' to take 'em up there."

He gazed pensively at the floor.

"You don't 'spose —"

"What, Nathan?"

"He couldn't 'a' took her off on the train anywheres."

"I — I — don't know," came faintly from Deborah.

"Have you looked in her room?"

"No; but I will."

Seizing a glass lamp from the shelf Deborah hurriedly mounted the stairs, Nathan at her heels.

The tiny room that the light so dimly illumined was appealing in its virgin whiteness. There was the smooth, spotless bed; the low bureau with its immaculate cover; the row of plain print gowns hanging limply from the pegs near the door. A spray of golden-rod in a cheap glass vase; a snapshot of Norman Minot; and a great opalescent shell were upon the table.

Deborah cast her eye searchingly about.

"Her woollen suit ain't gone, an' her best hat an' shoes are here."

"He may have coaxed her off unexpected."

"'Tain't probable. If Mr. Kittridge was goin' to take Tressie away he'd have took her in that automobile. What would he be doin' travellin' on the train when he had that car right here to go in? Besides, he wouldn't leave the thing behind him. He'd know well enough he could never come back an' get it."

Nate seemed scarcely to hear her torrent of arguments. He was gazing down at the little bed.

Suddenly he moved toward the wall, and burying his face in one of Tressie's gowns, burst into sobs. His grief was almost frightful in its abandon.

"My girl! My little girl!" he moaned. "Tressie! Tressie!"

"Hush, hush, brother! Don't take on so,"

pleaded Deborah awkwardly laying a hand on his arm.

Her voice shook strangely and there was a suspicion of moisture in her eyes.

"Come away, Nathan," she begged. "Let us go an' see if Mr. Kittridge's things are here."

It was a ruse, but it succeeded.

Catching at the straw, Nate choked back his tears.

Down the hall they sped, and passed into the opposite bedroom.

Here, too, all was undisturbed.

The bureau was littered with the familiar confusion of pipes, brushes, ties, and boxes of cigarettes from amid the chaos of which a photograph of Dora Mayhew looked out. There were books and golf-clubs about, and garments were strewn over the chairs.

"I guess there ain't nothin' missin' from here, either," announced Deborah. "The whole place always looks as if it was ridin' out. Even his pocketbook with all his money in it is under the pillow."

"Curse him an' his money!"

"Nathan!"

"I say it again. *Curse him!*"

"But we don't know any evil of the man, an' 'tain't right to go blamin' him until we do."

"'Twas a sorry day you got these boarders here."

The clock struck nine, and as its last echo died Nate straightened himself.

"I'm goin' to the Junction," announced he hoarsely.

"To the Junction! What for?"

"I'm goin' to find out if anybody took the afternoon train for Boston."

"But it's an awful night, an' it's five miles over there," remonstrated Deborah. "Besides, the station won't be open."

"I can hunt up 'Lisha Hall."

"You won't get home before midnight."

"What's the odds?"

"Mebbe you'll sleep better if you satisfy your mind."

"Sleep! Sleep!" The man turned fiercely upon her. "Do you think for a second I shall ever sleep again until I find Tressie? Can *you* sleep? Do you *want* to sleep?"

"We've got to keep strong to meet whatever comes."

"That's all talk. Sleepin' when your heart is breakin', an' your pulse poundin' like a trip-hammer! 'Tain't possible. I shan't ever close my eyes again until that child is found. I'll travel this Cape from one end to the other; I'll go to every town, every city in this land; I'll track down that cussed villain wherever he may be hidin', an' I'll kill him, by God — I'll kill him!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### NATHAN MAKES A DISCOVERY

SLOWLY the night dragged on, the clock beating out one weary hour after another.

About midnight Nate, haggard and disheartened, returned from the Junction with the tidings that no one had gone to Boston on the afternoon train. This news shattered the last clue to which the Harlows had clung.

Until morning further search was impossible.

Deborah rekindled the fire, and with dumb sympathy drew her brother's easy chair before it.

"I've made you some hot coffee, Nathan," she said, "an' here are your slippers. Sit down where it's warm, an' rest."

"Why don't you go to bed, Deborah?"

"Me? Oh, I ain't tired," was the response. "I've got all over bein' sleepy now. It's comfortable here, an' I think I'll set by you a spell. I — I — I'm awful sorry for you, Nathan," she added in a shy whisper.

The pity in her tone was more than the overwrought man could bear. Bowing his head on his hands great sobs shook his frame.

In consternation Deborah viewed the disastrous effect of her sympathy.

"Come, come," she said sharply, "you mustn't take on no more. For goodness' sake, be a man, Nathan. Remember you've got to keep a-holt of yourself, for you may need every atom of strength you can muster tomorrow."

The familiarly brusque command brought Nate to himself as perhaps nothing else could have done at the moment.

He sat up, brushing aside his tears.

"I'm goin' to telegraph Norman Minot the instant the office is open in the mornin'," he observed presently. "'Twas him brought that blackguard to Wilton. He may know somethin' about him. At any rate he can find out whether they're at his lodgin's or not. If they are I'm goin' up on the early train."

"An — an' — if they ain't?"

"I haven't got that fur yet."

Exhausted, he sank back into the chair, and Deborah saw him close his eyes.

"Mebbe he'll drop off," she thought, as scarce daring to breathe she sat rigidly by watching him.

But her hope was a vain one.

At the sound of a branch of willow blowing against the windowpane he was alert and on his feet.

"What's that?"

"What?"

"That tappin' on the glass?"

"Nothin' but the wind. Sit down again, Nathan."

The man, however, was unconvinced.

He went to the door and looked out.

Blackness shrouded the slumbering world, and through the murky stillness he could hear the dripping of the fog, the moaning of distant breakers, and the desolate warning note of the horn on the Shoals.

With a nervous shiver he closed the door and began pacing the room.

"Do you know I always thought Kittridge was took with Miss Mayhew," he at last remarked idly. "An' it seemed, too, as if she was took with him. I was 'bout certain they'd make a go of it. You could have knocked me down when I heard she was goin' to marry Norman Minot."

"I was surprised, too."

"Then it struck you same's it did me."

"Yes. Of course Dora'd been with Mr. Minot a lot before ever Kittridge came; but after he got here I somehow felt 'twas him she liked the best."

Nathan took a few turns across the kitchen.

"There was somethin' in the whole thing I never understood," he ruminated. "Minot appeared to veer off from Dora when Mr. Kittridge took her up, an' she an' him got to be so thick. Why, not two

hours before Norman told you he was goin' to marry Dora I come on her an' the artist out in the orchard, an' near as I could figger it he makin' love to her. What do you say to that?"

He halted before Deborah's chair and looked down at her.

"I don't know."

"It never seemed to me Dora Mayhew was the right sort of a wife for Norman Minot, anyway."

"Nor to me," chimed Deborah, making a Herculean effort to seem interested in the love affairs of her guests. Romance was not in her province. The mere mention of anything of the sort irritated her. However, she was willing for the time-being, to discuss any subject that would even for a few moments divert her brother.

"Why do you 'spose Mr. Minot decided to hitch up with Dora?"

"I can't imagine."

Deborah was getting beyond her depth.

She wished Nathan had selected sea-serpents or typhoons as his topic of conversation; little as she knew about either of these themes she could have made a far more intelligent showing than at interpreting conundrums of the heart.

"An' why should Dora tie herself to Mr. Minot if she really wanted to marry Mr. Kittridge?" went on Nathan.

"I've always thought 'twas Dora's mother urged

her to marry Norman Minot," replied Deborah. "Mebbe the Minots had more money; or their folks were better known."

"Lord! That ain't much of a way to get married."

The man scratched his head meditatively.

"Do you 'spose Dora felt bad about not marryin' Kittridge?"

"There's no tellin'," answered Deborah a trifle impatiently. "I only know Dora an' her mother had an awful set-to that afternoon; I heard 'em way down here. The window was open an' I couldn't help it. Dora was cryin', an' Mrs. Mayhew was a-scoldin' her."

"That Mrs. Mayhew was an old hyena!" snapped Nathan. "'Tain't often I get set agin folks; but I was awful set agin her. I wish to heaven she'd 'a' let her daughter marry Kittridge if she wanted to."

The remark suddenly brought back the tragic realities of the present.

"What time is it?" he inquired.

"Nearly five."

"It must be gettin' light."

Drawing aside the curtain he looked out.

A weather-drenched landscape greeted his vision.

The fog that had all night enveloped the hamlet had now crept out to sea with the same ghostly stillness with which it had stolen inland, and amid the pale light of early morning he could see its

ragged edges receding over the waters, and through it discern the white figures of ships, like wraiths in a phantom world, moving to and fro. It was a grey, desolate picture that chilled him with forebodings, he knew not why.

As he turned away sounds were heard on the boards outside and there was a knock at the door.

Simultaneously both he and Deborah sprang to open it.

On the silvered grass before the steps stood a group of fishermen.

Their oilskins glistened amber in the dawn, and their bronzed faces were awed and expectant. As they confronted their comrade a blended murmur of surprise and relief passed from one to another.

Half puzzled, half terrified by their presence, Nathan stood gazing down at them, waiting for them to speak.

Did they bring tidings; and if so, what were they?

He clutched at the door-frame for support.

They were kindly faces, those that were upturned to his — the faces of his neighbors: Zenas Henry, Phineas Taylor, John Bartlett, and a score of others.

"Thank the Lord you're safe, mate!" ejaculated Zenas Henry heartily. "You couldn't give us a better greetin' than the sight of yourself alive an' well."

"What should you be worryin' about me for?" queried Nate in amazement.

"Why, man, don't you know?"

"Know what? Speak out!"

"The *Sylph's* gone from her moorin's."

"Gone! Gone! The *Sylph* gone?"

He reeled backward as if he had been struck.

"You didn't know?" asked John Bartlett gently.

Nathan shook his head.

His agitation did not surprise them.

In Wilton a man's boat was his fortune. It seemed only natural that Nate should be concerned at hearing of his calamity.

"But how could she be gone without your knowin' it?" inquired Captain Bartlett. "She was made fast all right, warn't she? There warn't a mite of wind in the night, an' the sea ain't heavy enough for her to have dragged anchor."

Still Nate did not reply.

His friends began to be uneasy.

They had not dreamed he would be so overwhelmed by the news.

"You don't 'spose there's folks as has a grudge against you who could 'a' stole the boat, do you, Nate?" Zenas Henry asked, his hand on his friend's arm.

Then without warning, out of the anguish of his soul, Nathan spoke:

"My God!" he moaned. "My God!"

Noticing his pallor, Zenas Henry passed an arm about the shoulders of his comrade.

"You mustn't take it like this, mate," he protested kindly. "The boat will like as not turn up yet. I know how much you think of it, an' all its loss would mean; but don't go mournin' 'til you're sartin you're hurt. She might 'a' broke loose somehow, an' drifted out with the tide. We'll find her. There ain't a man along the coast that won't turn to, an' lend a hand in the hunt. Remember you've got friends, Nate — dozens of 'em; they're thick as clam-shells on the beach. They won't forget how you've stood by 'em when they were in a tight place, neither. Cheer up, comrade, cheer up! Every cloud —"

The old proverb was cut short by Nate's upraised hand.

"'Tain't the boat," he gasped hoarsely. "Tressie's gone!"

The effect of his words was instantaneous.

Every man of the throng standing there knew Tressie, and realized well what she meant in the Harlow home. The girl was a favorite in the village, especially among the fishermen who regarded her with affectionate camaraderie.

A hush fell upon them all.

"When —" began John Bartlett in a tense whisper.

But Nathan could not answer.

"They've been missin' since yesterday afternoon — her an' Mr. Kittridge," explained Deborah, stepping forward. "We've been settin' up for 'em all night. We never dreamed of their bein' out in the boat."

"Where else could they 'a' been?" demanded Zenas Henry. "If they warn't in the automobile I should 'a' thought you'd lit on the boat right away."

Deborah flushed.

Her obvious confusion puzzled, then suddenly enlightened her listeners.

"You didn't think —" began Zenas Henry, a wave of indignant crimson coloring his cheek.

"We — we —" Deborah broke off helplessly.

"But surely you couldn't have believed for a second Tressie'd go wrong," cried Zenas Henry, outraged affection goading him to anger. "You, Nate — you didn't think so?"

The words rung with reproach.

"Nobody can tell how a man might twist a girl like Tressie round his finger," put in Deborah.

"Tressie Harlow'd never do nothin' wrong, I know that," asserted Zenas Henry with all the fervor of a blind faith. "An' if some devil was to take advantage of her — well — I pity him, that's all I've got to say!"

An echo of muttered wrath came from the crowd that had gathered closer round Deborah.

"Mebbe I was hasty to think such a thing," Nathan said humbly.

"Hasty! You was clean crazy!" Zenas Henry retorted.

"You say they went off yesterday afternoon," interrupted John Bartlett, anxious to avert strife, and to ascertain the facts.

"Yes, they went to the shack to paint; it was afterwards, sometime, they must have took the boat. I can't devise how Tressie came to do it. She never did such a thing before. Nathan ain't ever let her go out without him."

"But she can sail anything afloat," declared Phineas Taylor jealously.

"'Twarn't her sailin' was at fault; 'twas the fog," asserted Zenas Henry loyally. "She likely didn't notice it hangin' low out there all day. Young folks wouldn't. I saw it sulkin' against the sky from daybreak on, only needin' the wind to veer, an' sweep it inland quicker'n you could count the fingers on your right hand. Within half-an-hour after the breeze sprang up it was thick as a blanket."

"If Tressie went outside, of course, there wouldn't be one chance in a million of her findin' the Channel again on such a night," remarked Benjamin Todd. "She's a fust rate sailor, though, an' she has a good head on her shoulders. Most likely

she had the wit to beat along outside, an' wait for the mist to lift."

Nate's face brightened.

"Do you think so?"

"It's mor'n probable that's just what she's done," rejoined Zenas Henry eagerly. "Don't you go givin' up the ship, mate, nor the sailors neither. Recollect they may be miles off their course, an' that it will, perhaps, take 'em hours to get back. Give 'em time."

"I hadn't thought of that."

Notwithstanding their optimism, however, the fishermen avoided meeting one another's eyes, and they steadily averted their glance from Nathan's.

"Now, mate," said John Bartlett, with touching kindliness, "you let us take up this search. We'll get out our boats, an' we'll pass the word along to the others on the coast to do the same. The life-savin' crew will turn out, too. In the meantime," he added with assumed off-handedness, "you try an' get a bit of rest."

"But I'm goin' with you."

Evidently Captain Bartlett had been prepared for the demurrer.

"Now wouldn't that be plumb foolish!" he exclaimed, smiling. "Why, man, we're goin' helter-skelter, this way an' that, all along 'twixt Provincetown an' Nantucket. 'Tain't no cruise for you to

set out on. 'Spose Tressie was to turn up while you were gone?"

"You'd want to be on the spot, Nate," put in Zenas Henry.

In the minds of each of the anxious group the same thought was uppermost.

Whatever they found, Nathan must not be there to see!

"You'll stay here, Nate, won't you, so'st we'll know where to signal you?" begged Phineas Taylor. "You see we've got to know where we can find you."

"Mebbe 'twould be better," murmured Nathan uncertainly.

"Course 'twould!"

Again Zenas Henry's hand gripped his shoulder, but this time the touch was tremulous with sympathy.

"Leave it to us, Nate," he whispered softly. "You can trust your old friends, can't you? Remember the little lass meant a lot to all of us."

A sob rose in Nate's throat.

Powerless to reply, but with a swift gesture of confidence, he put out his hands to the men nearest him.

"We'll get news to you quick's ever we can, comrade," called John Bartlett cheerily as they filed down the path.

In silence Nathan watched them disappear down the harbor road.

An untidy, rough-looking lot they were! But beneath their weather-stained coats beat hearts whose tenderness and loyalty could not be matched.

As he closed the door a fresh courage buoyed him up.

Had he, alas, overheard the comments of his friends when the straggling group was well out of earshot he would have realized how vain was the hope to which he clung.

"There ain't a chance for 'em," John Bartlett was saying to Zenas Henry. "Even if they escaped bein' cut down in the fog by some passin' vessel, they've most likely gone ashore."

Zenas Henry's face had become drawn and lined.

"Tressie'd never have took that boat all of herself," he declared fiercely. "'Twas that city feller urged her to it, you can bank on that. Boarders never brought no luck to a town. If there's trouble 'twill be on Deborah Harlow's head."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE TALE THE SEA TOLD

LIKE the false lights of dawn Nathan's newly born optimism lured him for an interval into a sufficiently normal mood to eat a good breakfast and appear lighter-hearted than he had been since Tressie's disappearance. But as the sun mounted the heavens, putting to flight the films of mist that lingered over the sea, and leaving the disc of ocean blue and cold as tempered metal, the confidence that had sustained him began to wane.

Until mid-day he watched for the return of the boats.

None came.

Shortly after noon his suspense became intolerable and Deborah saw him take down his coat and put it on.

"Where you goin'?" she asked.

"I dunno."

"But you surely ain't goin' out. You promised to stay here."

"I can't sit round indoors another minute," groaned Nate fretfully. "I've got to go somewheres — anywheres — so long's its away from this house."

"Of course you've got somethin' in your mind," persisted Deborah, not to be deceived by his nonchalant manner.

"Well, if you must know, I'm goin' down to the shack," Nate snapped, his strained nerves giving way under her cross-questioning.

"To the shack? To Mr. Kittridge's studio?" she repeated incredulously. "What earthly good will that do?"

"None, most likely. Still, it'll convince me Tressie ain't there."

"But you can't get in."

"I believe I can open the padlock with a bit of wire; anyhow I'm goin' to try."

"You won't find nothin' there."

"No matter. I'm goin'."

Deborah was visibly distressed.

"I might come with you," she ventured at last. "I ain't never been inside the place; have you?"

"No."

"Suppose we both go, if you think you can open it."

The suggestion did not please Nathan.

Weary and spent, he longed to be alone. This craving, so thinly concealed that it was unmistakable, Deborah was determined not to gratify. There was something in his face that she had never seen there before, something that terrified her.

"I think it will be kinder interestin' to see what

Mr. Kittridge has made of that shanty," she went on briskly. "You wait just a minute 'till I close up the stove. 'Twon't do no harm to leave the windows an' the door unlocked, I guess. She — somebody might come before we get back."

Paying not the slightest heed to her brother's reluctance to have her accompany him, she slipped on her coat.

Their way led across the dunes, snow-white against the sombre blue of the sea. The sedge that bordered the path had long since faded to bronze, and masses of it swayed hither and thither in the chill air as they passed.

Deborah drew her cloak closer about her.

A few steps in advance stalked Nathan, his eyes fixed on the sails that traversed the horizon. His stride was a long, swift one that defied a woman's more limited speed; nevertheless, although her breath came in spasmodic gasps, Deborah refused to slacken her pace.

The shack stood on the brink of an inlet of the bay where the boat-landings were, and on reaching it she instantly realized that it was this fact which in all probability had brought Nathan to the shore. The visit to the studio was a mere pretense. He was evidently resolved to be at the water's edge to meet the fishermen when they should return.

His deception nettled her.

Since, however, he was thus determined, protest

was useless; and if they could effect an entrance to the shanty the building would at least furnish them protection from the biting north-west wind that reeked the waste of sand, and was lashing the billows into foam.

While he fumbled with the lock she shivered in the autumn blast. That he was having trouble, she gathered from his petulant exclamations. The wire with which he was working bent, and he went down to the beach, where he straightened it between two stones.

Again he tried.

This time things went better. There was a sudden click of steel, and she heard him give a mutter of satisfaction.

"There we go!" he cried, a flicker of his old smile brightening his face. "Opened it neat as if I was a burglar by trade. Come along in if you're comin', Deborah."

As she crossed the sill he slid the doors together behind her.

The interior in which she found herself was low and dim, with rough silvered walls, and a roof supported by half-rotted beams. To the north were two windows now covered by a curtain of some worn yellow material; and near them, back toward her, stood a large canvas. An over-turned barrel littered with pigments and brushes served as a table; and two chairs, an earthen jar filled with branches

of pine, and a mass of white drapery evidently tossed in haste across a rude bench near the door completed the furnishings.

Deborah dropped into one of the chairs, rubbing her numbed fingers.

In the meantime Nathan had groped his way to the window, where he had pushed aside the curtains. She heard the rings upon them slide across the brass rod with a musical jingle.

Unheeding what he did she raised her stiff red hands to her lips and blew upon them to get them warm.

It was then that she became conscious of a tensity in the room.

Nate had ceased moving about and was standing confronting the canvas in the corner. So immovable was he that he seemed turned to stone.

"Is that the picture?" she asked, rising.

There was no answer.

Perhaps he did not hear.

Even when she came to his side he failed to be conscious of her nearness.

She raised herself on her toes that she might the better peep over his shoulder.

Then she gave a muffled cry.

From the canvas before her Tressie looked out, Tressie radiant in all her beauty. Behind her in the shadow stretched the sea, a vast, restless depth of green, illumined only by a rift of sunlight from

the dull clouds overhead. In the foreground, in contrasting vividness stood the girl, her flying draperies white against the waves; her bare feet scarce touching the sands; and her unbound hair a glory of swirling bronze that threw into relief her delicate features. One rounded arm held to her ear a conch-shell; and her listening face was expectant with wonder, wistfulness, and hope.

Robert Kittridge had indeed been right when he had pronounced the picture his masterpiece. Although the portrait was still unfinished, Tressie's very soul breathed from the canvas.

Speechless, Deborah gazed into the brown eyes.

How beautiful the girl was! She had never before sensed how beautiful.

The childlike spirit of a vanished day seemed to speak once more in the liquid fathomless eyes, the parted lips, the mobile face. She recalled the morning when Nathan had brought the little one home and placed her, heavy with sleep, in her arms. So fresh was the memory that even the fragance of the child's hair seemed wafted to her from the past. Ah, those days of babyhood crowded with successive illnesses, disasters, pranks, and punishments — how well she remembered them! And afterward childhood had melted into girlhood, girlhood into womanhood, and now before her was the Tressie of today, the incarnation of life and happiness.

Yet as Deborah looked into the shining face she

realized with vague regret how seldom she had seen Tressie in that abandonment of radiant joy. The light had always faded into shadow when the girl entered her presence. As the setting of the sun "calls the glory from the grey" and plunges the world into the sombreness of twilight, so something in herself — Deborah confessed sadly — had unfailingly quenched the glow from the girlish face, leaving in monochrome the beauteous picture.

That the two had been born of different planets, Deborah had recognized from the beginning. Their very language was dissimilar. But with every allowance for this variance of temperament had she not, perhaps, been to blame for the great gulf that separated them? Had she, she now asked herself, always been kind, patient, sympathetic? Rather, in bald self-approval, had she not tried to recast the girl in her own image? Never before had it come to her that possibly she had been self-righteous in her zeal to remodel Tressie. Certainly the God who had created her had not willed her to be otherwise. All-powerful to fashion each being as He chose He had not scorned to shape this His child in the semblance she now wore, and put within her a soul — a spark from His divine nature.

A wave of humility swept over Deborah.

What did this mean, what must it mean save that this embodiment of His spirit, widely as it differed from the form into which she had so obstinately

striven to mould it, was in His eyes equally worthy with her own? And all the time she had been thus attempting to improve on the handiwork of the Creator she had blindly thought herself the one type of being made in His likeness! Instead of reverencing the work of His hands had she not, in her egoism, sought to mar it by exterminating the joyous message it had been ordained to bring into the world?

Poor Deborah!

As she gazed into Tressie's eyes she felt as if she were standing before the Judgment Throne, her soul shorn of all the confused, inconsistent, mistaken motives of this earth. With the clear insight of the spirit, behold, now at last she saw!

"I'm afraid I've been too sharp with her," she owned penitently. "I was so anxious to do my duty, an' was so cocksure I knew what it was, that I guess I forgot to be kind."

A film clouded her eyes.

"If the Lord would only give her back to us I might do better," she whispered half aloud.

It was Nathan's voice that roused her from her grim reveries.

She heard him speaking quietly as if he was quite alone.

"Yes, that's her," he was saying. "That's Tressie, just as I've seen her a hundred times."

Aye, well might he say so! He had indeed seen

her thus. Never, thought Deborah with bitter self-reproach, had he banished from the girl's vision the clouds of glory she trailed after from that other world.

With the back of her hand the woman furtively brushed away the falling tears.

Still she could hear Nathan talking softly to himself:

"I never dreamed that feller Kittridge could paint like this!"

Emotion choked her utterance and she moved toward the door.

The sound brought Nathan to himself.

"Where you goin'?" he asked.

"I've got to have a breath of air," Deborah replied lamely.

Immediately he was at her side.

"Ain't you feelin' well?" he inquired with affectionate solicitude.

"Yes, I'm all right, only it's close here."

He pushed the sliding doors apart.

A rush of wind, mingled with the high-pitched voices of men, greeted them.

All unheralded the little fleet of boats had returned! Some were already anchored, and aboard the others men were busy furling the sails and making things fast.

With a leap Nate cleared the steps and was on the sand beside Zenas Henry.

"What did you find?" he demanded. "Anything?"

The consternation that travelled from the face of one man to another made it instantly apparent that none of them had expected to see him there. Zenas Henry recoiled, then advanced to meet his comrade; but he did not answer. He seemed for the moment to have been struck dumb.

It was John Bartlett who came forward, a great tenderness in his stern countenance. Strong man though he was, his lips quivered.

"Yes, we've got some news for you, Nate," he answered gently. "It ain't, though, what we wish it was."

"Tell me, man, tell me! Don't keep me standin' here. Did you get any track of the boat?"

"Yes."

A fire of hope shot into Nathan's eyes.

"Where did you find it?"

"It come ashore."

"Come — come — ashore?" repeated Nate mechanically.

"Yes," Captain Bartlett nodded, an agony of pity in his face. "'Twas washed up on Turner's Beach."

Slowly the significance of the words began to dawn on Nathan's bewildered mind.

"An' Tressie?" He framed the question huskily.

"There warn't no trace of her nor Kittridge. The *Sylph* must have been cut down by some passin' ship; it was lyin' half buried in the sand." He paused. "We dug her out an' searched her, but there warn't nothing aboard except this."

From his blouse he drew forth a sodden rose-colored scarf.

"'Twas hers!" cried Deborah. "I saw her wearin' it yesterday when she started out from the house."

But from Nathan there came no sound.

He had caught the silken token to his breast and pitched forward into the arms of Zenas Henry.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CRISIS

In the meantime, while Nathan and Deborah suffering the agonies of blackest despair, all unknown to them Tressie and Robert Kittridge were safely aboard the freighter which in the darkness had crumpled their little craft as if it were an eggshell.

Their escape from death was miraculous.

First had come the swiftly enveloping fog; then the hours of fruitless search for the Channel; the impenetrable pall of night; the great shadowy spectre that loomed dense and unheralded above them; and the quick, sharp crashing of timber. Afterward had followed a sensation of icy water closing overhead; a struggle for air; the mad fight against the angry ocean; and the paralyzing cold and numbness.

Even now as Tressie lay half-dazed in a rough bunk of the schooner she could feel Kit's powerful arm about her, and hear his stern admonition: "Don't touch me, little girl! Keep your nerve. I'll hold you up."

She had always been a good swimmer, but in the

grip of the chill water she had found herself powerless. She knew enough of the perils of the sea, however, to realize the importance of his command, and automatically she had obeyed it. It seemed hours that they clung together amid the high-mounting combers. Then a flash of light had swept the waters, there was a confusion of voices, and she and Kit had been dragged into a boat.

The details of what followed were a blur. But always among the dim, receding faces about her there was Kit. Even when she felt herself sinking into the abysses of the nether world and was unable to tell him she heard, she was vaguely conscious of his touch and voice.

Now as her faculties began to return the horror of the tragedy rushed so vividly over her that the sound of the wash against the ship's side filled her with terror.

The cabin where she lay alone was cheerless and faintly lighted by a foul-smelling kerosene lamp; nevertheless, its warmth was grateful and comforting for she was still cold, drowsy, and hysterical.

A chaos of tangled memories tormented her.

Foremost among them towered the thought that she had wrecked the *Sylph,* her uncle's dearest possession. It would break his heart. Never, never could the loss be made good. It would take a small fortune to buy another boat, and where was it to come from? Had they not been working all sum-

mer to secure enough money to wipe clear their debts, and furnish them with food for the approaching winter? There was, alas, no nest-egg in reserve that could be appropriated for the purchase of a new boat!

On the heels of this fact crowded another. The family at home must at this moment be wondering where she was, and worrying lest disaster had befallen her. She knew they would worry — at least her uncle would. He always fretted when she was away, even were it in broad daylight. To have her gone an entire night and not know where she was would drive him to frenzy. Of course by this time he would have discovered that the *Sylph* was missing, and would know that she had taken it. Maybe when he found that out he would be so angry that he never would be able to forgive her or love her again.

Dear Uncle Nate! How kind he had always been to her, and what a poor return she had now made for his affection! Of all the world he was the last person to whom she would have done an injury. Never within her memory had he spoken a sharp word to her, or done one thing to cause her pain. Always gentle, always sympathetic, since childhood he had been the parent to whom, in her loneliness, she had clung. He had been father, mother, all else beside. And now she had wounded him beyond the power of healing. She had deprived him of the

chief delight of his existence, the thing he treasured most — his boat; his other self, which was to him as his own soul! Only one who followed the sea could realize what that meant.

How many times when rasped by her aunt's rebukes the two, like a pair of chastened children, had fled to the peace of the *Sylph*. The little yawl had seemed a fellow-being that understood, and held out to them its silent sympathy. What their days would be without this refuge she dared not think. In all Wilton no balm would remain, no solace for hearts that were bleeding, or spirits that were crushed. There would be no source from which they could draw courage for the morrow. What marvel if her uncle could never forgive her for this?

Then into her mind, filling it with utter despair, came the picture of the inescapable monotony of the days that must follow. With the loss of the boat her own paradise of dreams was cut off. Norman Minot had gone, and soon Kit would go too, and she would be left alone to face her aunt's reprimands, and the silent reproaches of her uncle. Perhaps now he might even take sides with her aunt and turn against her. In her nervous imaginings she began to feel that he had already done so, and the fact was the last drop in her cup of misery.

How could she ever go back to face a future like this?

Sobbing weakly she moved her head from side to side on the pillow. Her hair was still dank and heavy with salt, and dragged painfully back from her forehead. Fatigued as she was, she could not sleep. The air of the captain's little cabin was too close, and the odors with which the ship reeked too disagreeable; in addition the ceaseless din of horns and whistles disturbed her rest.

As the hours of the night wore on her mind travelled backward to the happenings of yesterday, and the events that had brought about her present extremity. Was it only yesterday that Kit had held her in his arms and kissed her there in the studio? It seemed years ago! Nevertheless as she now recalled the scene, smouldering embers of the fire it had created again throbbed within her. She could feel the touch of his hot, eager lips against her own. He had called it a mad moment, and from the sober perspective of sanity she now recognized it as such; but it had been very sweet, opening to her a realm of sensations new, strange, and wonderful. She was not at all sure she loved Kit, but she was glad to have him love her, for she was starving for sympathy and affection. She supposed Kit did love her. What else could his action mean?

Sometimes she had fancied Norman Minot loved her, or at least cared very much for her. To be sure, he had never said so. In fact, he had never breathed the smallest syllable to give her cause to

believe he did. Notwithstanding this, however, he had had a way of looking at her; of speaking to her; of anticipating her wants, that had made her feel that something within him was reaching out to her. But it could not have been so. She must have imagined it. Was he not to marry Dora Mayhew? And had he not left Wilton without one word of farewell? She wished she had known when he went away that he was not coming back; she would have liked to talk with him just once more and say goodbye. Now she probably would never see him again.

She began to cry hysterically, and to stifle the sound she buried her face in the pillow. How foolish it was to be crying about a man who was to marry somebody else, who had deliberately chosen to do so. She was nothing to Norman Minot, and never had been. It was absurd to give him another thought. Everything made her cry tonight. It must be the effect of all she had gone through. She would not think of Norman any more.

But despite this resolve, try as she would, he was not so easily banished from her mind.

How strange it was that he had always understood her so perfectly. No one except her uncle had ever done so before. He had the same way of looking deeply into her eyes, and of smiling at her. Then, too, he liked the very things she liked — the long tramps through the wooded roads fragrant

with pine; the tang of the salt air; the fragile loveliness of a flower; the mingled resistance and yielding of a ship's rudder. Never was she more content than in his company. Within his shadow brooded a mighty peace that in some inexplicable way seemed to shelter her from all that was unknown and fearsome in the great world. How unlike he was to Kit — Kit whose very touch set her cheeks aflame, and the blood beating through her veins. There was no peace with Kit; only a sweet, mad delight that brought in its wake an aftermath of self-condemnation and shame.

Yet Kit, too, had been kind to her — nay, kindness was not the word. Had he not, in that awful moment of her peril, endangered his life to save hers? What chance would she have had against the snarling waves but for the strength of his powerful arm, and the compelling force of his will? Without a thought of self he had rescued her from death, and through the long weary watches of the night her chief comfort was to know that he was near and would take care of her.

With this consolation she closed her eyes, and lulled by the motion of the ship she fell toward morning into a heavy, dreamless slumber. From this sleep she was aroused by Kit's voice, speaking softly outside:

"Tressie, dear! Your clothes are dry, and I'm leaving them here at the door. I'd get up now if I

were you. It is nearly four o'clock, and we are coming into Boston."

Boston!

Until that instant, strangely enough, she had taken no thought as to whither she was journeying. The captain had explained that the vessel with its cargo of lumber could not make port until morning, and that therefore there would be no opportunity to send a message to her uncle that night. The rest she had accepted with indifference, being too weak and ill to protest or care. Now she suddenly sensed that during the long hours she had spent tossing in her berth the faithful ship had been fighting its way amid the blackness and the shoals that rendered so dangerous the ocean path skirting the Massachusetts coast. How treacherous those waters were no one knew better than herself; and as if bestowing a guerdon upon a conqueror, she put out her hand and with mute gratitude, touched caressingly the good ship's side.

It did not take her long to dress. So unexpectedly had she and Kit set forth on their eventful cruise that she had only the white gown she chanced to be wearing, and a faded red sweater she had later dragged from the *Sylph's* cuddy. When ready to go on deck she glanced at herself in the wee mirror and smiled wanly. Her white dress was sadly bedraggled, and she had no hat. Usually a trip to Boston was the feature of the year, or sometimes a

span of years, and her appearance on such an occasion was, to herself at least, a matter of vast importance. That she should now be going to the city in her present guise was ironic. She wondered what Kit would think when he saw her, he was such a critic of a woman's appearance.

When he greeted her on deck a little later, however, it was evident that what she wore was a matter of no concern to him. Instead he looked anxiously down into her face, and his first question was:

"You're all right, Tressie? Not ill?"

"No, indeed."

"Thank Heaven for that! Did you sleep any?"

"A — a — little."

Gently he took her hands.

"Poor little girl," he murmured. "But you came through it like a heroine. I never saw anyone so cool-headed."

"I didn't know I was cool-headed."

"But you were. The men all marvelled at you," declared he, smiling into her eyes. "If you hadn't been we should neither of us be here to tell the tale today."

He pressed her cold fingers affectionately, then tucked one of her hands beneath his arm.

"Suppose we walk a little; shall we? I will bundle you up in one of the men's coats. There are things we must talk over before we land. We've

got to decide just what we better do. You see, unfortunately, I have no money with me, nor can I get any at this early hour of the morning. Of course later I will send some to these people who picked us up; that will settle them. The ship will dock, they tell me, about five; and in the meantime, until the city is astir, we must go somewhere and wait." He paused a moment consciously, then added: "We can't very well go to a hotel in this plight. What would you say to our taking a taxi up to my apartment?"

"You know best."

"You wouldn't object?"

"Oh, no. Why should I?"

She thought she saw a shade of relief cross his countenance, but he merely said:

"I — I — don't know. It isn't a very conventional thing to do. Still, we must go somewhere."

"I don't see why it shouldn't be all right," came innocently from Tressie.

"If you honestly feel that way about it that is all I want to know," returned Kit. "Leaving all my money at Wilton makes things a bit awkward. Besides, you must own we are a rather unusual looking pair to be drifting about the streets of a large town like this."

They both laughed.

As the stir and excitement of landing followed almost immediately further discussion was cut

short. Tressie had a dazed memory of shaking hands with the captain and crew of the schooner; of whirling in the grey morning light through deserted streets; of catching glimpses of high roofs against the sky; of traversing dim hallways; of toiling up endless flights of stairs; and of Kit unlocking a door.

A rush of stifling air greeted her.

"My, but it is close in here!" cried Kit, kicking aside the mail strewn upon the floor, and hurrying forward to throw open the windows. "Dirty, too, I'm afraid. The dust is an inch thick. Had I known I was to have a lady guest I should have sent word to have the place cleared up."

There was an unaccountable note of gay triumph in his tone such as Tressie had sometimes heard when he had been particularly successful at mixing an elusive color.

Drawing forward a deep chair with spacious arms, he put her into it.

"Now you must rest, dear," he said tenderly. "A little later I will slip out and order some breakfast for us. You must be hungry. Perhaps in the meantime I can find something round here that will keep you from becoming faint. I ought at least to have some biscuit."

He passed through into the other room, where she could hear him rummaging among boxes and papers.

"Please don't bother, Mr. Kittridge," she called. "I'm really not very hungry. Let's wait."

But Kit paid no heed to her words.

While he was gone Tressie looked about her.

The room where she sat was a large and rarely beautiful one, more beautiful than any she had ever seen before. The walls and hangings were of dull blue, in contrast to which a few gilt-framed pictures caught the light. There were bookcases; a litter of bronzes and carvings; a hooded fireplace of grey stone; and in the vista, against a curtain of velvet, a marble statue of a nude child. From somewhere overhead a golden glow fell upon the interior, bathing it in mellow warmth. Through the heavy portières she could see that the adjoining room was the studio; and it was there she knew Kit to be moving about.

"Don't hunt any more, Mr. Kittridge," she repeated. "Indeed I don't want anything."

"Just as you say."

He came back and stood before her, studying her face.

For some unknown cause she suddenly began to feel uncomfortable.

"How soon can we get a train to Wilton?" she asked timidly.

He did not reply at once, but continued to look at her searchingly.

Slowly she raised her head, as if compelled to do so, and her eyes met his.

"The train," she murmured in confusion.

"Train?" he repeated.

"Yes. Do you know when it goes? My uncle will be frantic with worry. Oh, Mr. Kittridge, it is all so dreadful it doesn't seem as if I could face him! How ever shall I tell him that the *Sylph* is lost?"

In spite of a piteous attempt to keep her composure, tears brimmed her eyes.

Kit sat down on the arm of her chair and drew her gently toward him.

"Tressie."

The quiet, masterful tone of his voice arrested her attention.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Why go back to Wilton at all?"

## CHAPTER XX

### TRESSIE'S DECISION

FOR the space of a few seconds there was silence in the room.

Neither moved.

Kit was letting his suggestion stamp itself on the girl's bewildered mind.

It was not until he saw the puzzled expression of her face give way to a flush of comprehension that he ventured to speak again; then, as if fearing delay, he began with impetuous swiftness:

"Wilton is no home for you, sweetheart. What is your life there — nothing but unhappiness and repression. Your nature is being stifled by an aunt who does not understand you; who is sharp-tongued; and who makes your days wretched. Up to this time you have had your uncle and the boat for companionship; but now the boat is gone, and probably your uncle will be angry, and blame you for taking it. And even if all this were not so," he went on earnestly, "what future is there for a girl like you in such a tiny, isolated village — you who were made for pleasure, youth, beauty, love; not to be a drudge to the end of your days?"

Leaning forward, he touched his lips to her hair.

"You know you do not wish to go back; you dread the very thought. Come, confess it!"

"I don't see —" faltered Tressie, breaking off uncertainly. "What else is there for me to do?"

Again she heard that disquieting laugh from Kit.

He bent lower until his cheek was against hers.

"Listen, dear," he whispered softly. "Yesterday neither you nor I had any intention of going away together. But see how Fate has taken things out of our hands. Here we are! Nobody knows our whereabouts; nobody can unless we choose to divulge them. The *Sylph* has been wrecked, and so far as the world knows we have gone down with her. By tomorrow night the schooner that rescued us will have discharged her cargo and cleared for South America, leaving no tidings behind. Can't you see how everything has worked out? Even should your uncle's boat be washed ashore it will only serve to convince people more fully that we have perished."

He stopped to note the effect of his words; then sped on with feverish haste:

"Could we have planned the whole affair ourselves we could not have done it better; there is no breath of scandal behind us, no danger of discovery ahead."

Once more he paused.

"Can't you see, darling, how unhampered we are? How it leaves us free to be together?"

Tressie started at the word.

"Together?" she repeated slowly. "How — how — could we be?"

Kit hesitated.

He was finding his task more difficult than he had foreseen.

"Did you ever think, Tressie," he went on at last, carefully choosing his words, "that I was fond of you?"

"I — don't — know. Yes, perhaps so," admitted the girl almost inaudibly.

"That I was very fond of you?"

This time she did not answer but sat with downcast eyes, nervously twisting the ring on her finger.

"That I was so fond of you that I would like to have you near me — very close, all the time?"

Still she said nothing.

"That is what I mean, dearest. I want you with me every moment of every day."

"For us to get married, Mr. Kittridge?"

He recoiled.

"That depends on what you mean by marriage, little girl," he answered with the gentleness one would use in speaking to a child. "Real marriage, Tressie, has nothing whatsoever to do with the empty customs of the world. Everyone is coming to realize that. Think how many persons there are who are yoked together by law, and yet are actually nothing to one another. Is it not true that

only when a man and woman care supremely for each other a real marriage exists — a marriage that counts for anything?"

He ceased abruptly.

How stilted it all sounded! He had often threshed out his creed before and it had been convincing against all argument. Why was it that today the fire of truth was gone from it, and his words fell dead upon the air?

Annoyed, he veered to another tack.

"Wouldn't you like to live in the city, Tressie?" he asked, drawing her closer. "Suppose we were to go over to New York and furnish a little apartment, wouldn't you like it?"

"New York!" he heard her breathe in an awed tone.

Eagerly he caught at the advantage he had gained.

"Wouldn't it be nicer to live in New York than to stay forever in Wilton?" he persisted. "What is there for you to look forward to there? Only your aunt's fault-finding, and a life of disappointment and monotony."

He could feel her shudder.

"Now if you were with me my one aim would be to make you happy. You should hear music, see pictures, wear pretty gowns; enjoy all the beauty that belongs to you, and which you should have had from the beginning."

Still she did not reply.

"Tressie!"

The word was a command, and she obeyed it.

"Yes."

The monosyllable, however, was so low it told him nothing.

"Don't you want to be loved? To be with some one to whom you would mean all the world? Who would sympathize with you, understand you, care only for you?"

Ah, he touched her then.

Into her eyes leaped a hungry, yearning light.

"Wouldn't it be better than Wilton, and being always alone?"

All restraint had vanished now.

Without mercy he crushed her in his arms and pressed his burning lips to hers.

"Wouldn't it be better?" he panted. "Wouldn't it? Tell me."

"Yes."

The reluctance of her surrender piqued his pride and drove him on.

"Would you be glad?"

Something in her face hurried him into reversing the question and making it an assertion.

"Of course you'd be glad. You would have to be glad, you little witch, if I once set my mind to making you so," he declared with triumphant egoism. The confident ring of the words was tempered with an appealing tenderness.

Then without speaking he gathered her in his arms and held her close against his breast.

Kit was a royal lover, one born to woo woman. He did it now with all the ardor of his being. Against the charm of his personality, the might of his will, the call of his sex, Tressie was helpless. The power she had long feared and dreaded rushed over her with its magnetic current and against its tide she found herself weak and resistless. All that his words meant she was too unversed in the ways of the world to do more than dimly understand. She only knew that Kit loved her very dearly, that he was there holding her in his arms and that the touch of his lips roused within her strange, mysterious reaches of emotion.

Never again was she to go back to the loneliness and grinding monotony of Wilton! Never more hear her aunt's chiding voice! She was to begin to live in a universe of beautiful things which were in harmony with all that had been censured and crushed in her since childhood.

It was like a dream coming true.

The price she was to pay for this roseate future she did not comprehend.

Kit, studying her mobile face, saw that at last victory was complete. The zest of the combat had been greater than he had foreseen, and his hard won success brought with it a proportionate exhilaration.

He released the girl from his arms and started to leave her.

"Kiss me, Tressie," he said.

She drew back.

"No? Then I suppose I must be content with kissing you, you tantalizing little kitten," he asserted with a light, baffled laugh.

Tilting her chin upward, he softly pressed the warm lips.

"Now it is time you had some breakfast, dear," he declared in a matter-of-fact voice, rising as he spoke. "Unluckily there is no café in the house, and the telephone is disconnected; so I shall have to leave you and go out and order something. I won't be gone long, however. In the meantime you can look about and make yourself at home, for this will be home from now on, you know. After we've had something to eat we'll call a cab and go shopping. I am impatient to dress my little princess to please myself."

She heard him cross the hall and go out.

Then a heavy stillness fell upon the room.

With the ceasing of his voice, and the absence of his caresses she came slowly to herself. How alone she was! Everything about her was strange. It seemed as if the glamour had suddenly dropped from the world, leaving it stripped and hideous in its nudity.

What was this thing she was about to do? And

what the relation into which Kit was so summarily whirling her?

She tried to calm her confused brain, and eliminating his personality and his alluring pictures of the future, reach the ungarnished facts.

Once on the beach she had overheard the fishermen gossiping together about some man at Belleport who had brought a woman home to live with him. Their talk had not been ribald, but it had been cruelly bald of illusions, and its pitiless realism had enlightened her as no amount of her aunt's nebulous and supermodest cautions could ever have done. Now as she recalled their words, she shivered. Could this plan of Kit's, when shorn of its mirage of beauty, be the same ugly thing? And once, she remembered, Aunt Deborah had obscurely hinted that no good woman —

The term fixed her attention.

*Good?*

She wanted to be good, of course she did. If she were not, how was she in the great Hereafter to face those unknown parents who had brought her into the world? How meet the eyes of her uncle?

Her uncle's and her aunt's methods of influencing her against evil had from the first been bewilderingly different. Deborah was merciless toward the sinner. Many a time Tressie had heard enumerated in terms of the old theology the chastisements that awaited the doer of evil. Yet vividly as these

now came before her, in the moment of her temptation the vision of them was as nothing when weighed against the appeal made to her heart by her uncle's affection. Fear she could defy, but not love. For the doom of eternal damnation she cared nothing. Was not the future uncertain, and the joy of the present very near? But the punishment of bringing shame and sorrow upon her uncle, and forfeiting his love — that was a penalty not to be endured.

Sometimes, with the same fearful fascination with which a child will conjure up imaginary terrors, she had pictured with dread a time when this gentle soul would no longer be with her. Heartbreaking, however, as the thought had been she had always banished the terror from it by reflecting that after all nothing could really separate them. Surely a love like theirs would span every gulf, and transcend death itself — transcend it unless through the frailty of her humanity she herself raised some barrier that should render unity impossible; and what obstacle could she raise mighty enough to bar her from him except to make herself unworthy?

Dear, dear Uncle Nate!

How her heart went out to him!

Were she never to see him again there would be nothing left in life. No one was so close to her heart as he.

She wondered idly as she sat there if she loved Kit like that — if she loved him at all.

It seemed today as if she did; and yet even in the ecstasy of today there had been something lacking. And if his present ardor did not wholly satisfy her how would it be when he was in a less rapturous mood? There were times, she knew well, when he was depressed, irritable; times when he scarcely spoke, preferring solitude to any sort of companionship. Would he feel the same way toward her then? And would she be able to fulfill his demands when, his brilliant self, he held by the thraldom of his wit a coterie of listeners? Moreover, could she entirely trust Kit? Was his philosophy sound? And if she followed whither he led would she still be on the side of the father and mother who had given her birth; on the side of her uncle; the side of the Wilton fisherman? Or like outlaws, would she and Kit be ranged against them? On which side, she asked herself with palpitating breast, would Norman Minot stand?

Oh, if only what Kit was urging her to do was not wrong! If she might but live to the full, live in the sweet protection of a man's love! If she might only enjoy the beauty and happiness the world had to give! Why was Life so cruel as to forbid her the very things she wanted!

She began to walk restlessly up and down the long room. As she passed a mirror she caught a

full-length reflection of herself outlined against the velvet hangings and she stopped, viewing the picture. Yes, here was the background that Kit had told her was hers by right. Instantly she recognized its fitness. In an atmosphere of beauty, appreciation, and love she would blossom into the creature nature had intended her to be. Surely it could not be wrong for her to live out her destiny.

And even suppose she placed the very worst possible construction on Kit's proposals and admitting them to be wrong she nevertheless accepted them. What then? Ah, here came the test. Did she care enough for this man to commit a crime for his sake? Was the future he offered worth it?

She saw its vistas of beauty opening; saw the treasures she craved within her reach. Again, as at the divine temptation, the kingdoms of the earth were hers if she would bow her head before the Prince of Darkness, and give in exchange for them her own soul. Her uncle's face came before her. If she were to consent to this compact she would be cut off from him forever. Was there a happiness in the world worth purchasing at such a price? To break his heart, to bring disgrace on those who had made her their child, and had shared with her the very roof that afforded them shelter! Never before had Tressie confronted her naked soul, or formulated her love and obligation to her foster parents. Now selfishness, ingratitude, stared her in the face.

Because of Kit's spell over her she might, perhaps, consent to do evil; but because of that far stronger power, the power of her uncle's love, she would do the more difficult thing, and forsake evil for good.

The battle was over at last.

All was clear now.

She wheeled about, decision shining in her eyes.

She would go home.

Come what might, she would return to Wilton.

No siren voices should lure her from the path she now knew to be the only one possible. If her days were to be empty of joy and sympathy she would strive to be content; if her aunt wounded her sensitive nature she would pray for patience; if her uncle turned from her in anger, the wrath she had brought upon herself she would bravely endure. She would never live a cringing, thieving coward, filching from life gifts that might not honestly be hers.

Searching Kit's desk she found a bit of paper and a pencil.

What should she say?

She must make haste lest he return and the combat have to be waged against him in person. Strong as she felt in the might of her victory, she owned herself too cowardly to face Kit, and the possibility of defeat.

She poised the pencil only a second in the air, then wrote hurriedly.

Afterward she placed the note where he could not fail to see it, and fled down the stairs, her heart beating tumultuously.

Not until she was on the pavement did she realize her ignorance of the city, or remember that she was entirely without money. Nevertheless, neither consideration held her back. Somebody would befriend her, she was sure. There must be kind people in the world who would listen to her story and help her. Faint for want of food, trembling, ill-clad, she sped along, asking her way as she went.

Strangers glanced curiously after the flying figure, then shrugged their shoulders and passed on.

With the faith of those who followed the Pillar of Cloud, Tressie went her way. No longer was she a child, viewing the untried universe with affrighted gaze. As if by miracle the latent womanhood within her had leaped into its heritage. She had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge and, behold, its fruit had caused the scales to drop from her eyes so that she saw the good and the evil. Behind her lay sympathy, luxury, beauty; before her loneliness, poverty, privation; yet she neither faltered nor regretted her choice. The God of her fathers was on her side, and beneath her were the everlasting arms.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE HOMECOMING

LEFT to himself, Kit also had had his interval for reflection, and under its sobering influence had begun to sense how futile was the scheme which only a short time before had looked so plausible. What an absurdity it was for a man to think he could lose himself! To destroy one's identity was not so easy. The idea was undoubtedly a romantic one, and was all very well as the plot for a book, or the scenario for a play; but in actual life it was not workable.

Already probably a score of persons had seen and recognized him; and even if this were not the case they would do so before he could get under cover. Moreover, where could he hope to hide himself? So extensively had he travelled both in his own country and across seas that there were few, if any spots on either hemisphere where he would not be in constant danger of discovery.

Even supposing such an Eldorado could be found it would be impossible to conceal his existence should he continue to put forth more work. There was a stamp of individuality in his treatment of

subjects that was unmistakable. Connoisseurs were not to be deceived. For him to attempt to eradicate this trade mark from his pictures was as vain as for the leopard to seek to change its spots.

It flashed into his mind that he might abandon art altogether, but this solution of his difficulties he promptly dismissed as a measure too drastic to be thought of. As well stop breathing as stop painting. Was it not the thing he loved above everything else; the profession to which he had devoted not only a good part of his fortune, but also years of persistent study and hard work? To renounce it just when he was acquiring the fame and recognition for which he had striven would be brainless. It would mean the tossing away both of his career and his chief source of income. The woman did not live for whom he would make this sacrifice. Furthermore, if he were to carry out the travesty of burying himself alive he should be forced to sever all his college and social affiliations — another grave condition.

And as if this accumulation of hindrances did not loom to sufficient magnitude to stay him in his project, there were in addition the smaller and more specific obstacles offered by the immediate present. There was, for example, the half finished picture now at Wilton, the masterpiece into which he had put hours of time, strength, and effort. Could he let it lie there uncompleted, unclaimed? It had

come into being, he believed, under a most fortunate star, and so supremely did it tower above his other artistic attempts that he was in a fever of impatience to put the last touches to it.

Of course the fact that his personal effects remaining at the Harlows' since the moment of his unexpected flight must be relinquished, was too petty to matter; nevertheless he wished it was possible for him to get possession of his car, his paints, and some of the other things he had left behind.

As these factors against his proposed decision gradually rolled themselves up, still another more stupendously culminative than all the rest massed together, linked itself with them. This was the element of Tressie herself. Kit coveted approval. His wit, his talent, had always won this guerdon for him. Praise spurred him to his best effort as did no other incentive; and to a corresponding degree censure plunged his mercurial temperament into a slough of depression. Deeply, however, as the higher criticism reacted on his super-sensitive personality a more profound component in his peace of mind was his own endorsement or condemnation. It always fretted Kit to feel at odds with his inner being, and be unable to dub himself a good fellow.

Now as he held the mirror up before his soul he suddenly found that he was on very poor terms indeed with his conscience. He could not think of Tressie's sweet innocence without acknowledging

that he was a cur. This girl was no courtesan who open-eyed chose the downward path, knowing full well whither it led; nor was she a practised woman of the world acquainted with the windings of its tortuous ways. She was a novice unversed in intrigue, deceit, and the many wiles of evil; little more, in fact, than a child. Should he ruthlessly force temptation into her path was it not true that a millstone might better be hanged about his neck, and he be cast into the sea? Granted that her life was cramped, and that he could provide her with a broader outlook; granted, even, that he could bring to her love and happiness; might she not far better do without these blessings than barter for them the paramount treasure woman has to bestow? Was it merely to this end that he had battled for her life out there in the angry waters? Had he saved her body only that he might wreck her soul?

The question seared him to the marrow.

Under ordinary conditions Kit would without compunction have taken beauty where he found it, terming as quixotic and antediluvian all cavil as to the morality of his course. Tressie was surpassingly lovely, and not one man in a hundred, he now argued, would surrender such a prize when it was actually within reach. After all, what did it matter? When tested against the vastness of eternity:

> "How small a part of life they share
> Who are so wondrous sweet and fair!"

The girl's beauty would be gone tomorrow. Why not live for today? In harmony with this creed the haunting lines of his beloved Persian poet chanted themselves through his memory, their insidious paganism, and their luring oriental philosophy urging him on. Had Tressie Harlow only been of a different type Kit would not have hesitated for an instant. But like Norman Minot he too had his code of honor, inconsistent as it might have appeared to the outside world. Carefully weighing now his proposed plan he found in the contract something so unequal, so despicably unfair, that the thought of it repelled him.

Possibly had it not been for Dora Mayhew he might have brought himself to marry Tressie — Tressie with her untarnished beauty, her unfathomable eyes, and her still more unfathomable soul. The girl fascinated him to an extent he had not dreamed possible. Her shy, reluctant yielding to his pleas had roused in him an insatiable desire to compel her to absolute surrender. Had she been the queen of coquettes she could not have chosen a weapon that would beckon him on as did this artless reticence. But there was Dora. What an empty fetish it was still to cling so stubbornly to a woman who had passed beyond the span of his horizon! Why, Dora was already married, or as good as married, to one of his best friends. Nevertheless, although he accepted this knowledge with

his head, his heart with unaccountable tenacity refused to relinquish its allegiance. Until Dora was actually the wife of another man Kit vowed he never would give her up. He admitted under the searching light of the present what he had never before been willing to own — that Dora not only stood between him and Tressie, but also that she stood between him and his work; between him and his future. He had been blind not to have recognized earlier that she was the only mate in the world for him, and fought to win her instead of meekly surrendering her to some one else.

Well, if he had made one mistake he at least need not make another, he conceded with a half-bitter, half-amused curl of his lip. In so far as Tressie was concerned there was still time to rectify his blunder. Only one straightforward course was open to him, and this he would take. It was ignominious — that is to say, ignominious if taken at its face value. It demanded that he relinquish the rôle of lover, and assuming instead that of patriarch or father-confessor, persuade Tressie to go home. And if he was to do this he must act immediately, for trains that would take the girl to Wilton before night were very few.

With grim purpose he wheeled about and began walking rapidly in the direction from which he had come.

He did not fancy the mission before him. Above

everything he dreaded a woman's tears, and he felt certain that tears would be the greeting his altruism would receive. Tressie, with her mind now set on a rainbow future, would doubtless be cruelly disappointed to have it snatched away from her, and her dreams shattered into nothingness. Sometime, however, when she had gained a more mature knowledge of the world and its ways she would understand and be glad, and until that time arrived he must steel himself to endure her reproaches, and the stigma of being rated a turncoat.

As he retraced his steps he speculated as to what he should say. He must deal with the child gently and wisely, and not enlighten her too much. He framed sentence after sentence, but none of the babel of words that came to his tongue seemed to be the right ones. To tell a woman you had changed your mind was awkward, damned awkward! What a cad he was to have got himself into such a plight!

He was on the stairs now, mounting them with leaden feet, and still the phrases he was seeking refused to formulate themselves on his tongue. Even as he thrust the key into the lock and the door swung open no introduction to his panegyric came to his mind.

From the hall he saw at once that the living-room where he had left Tressie was vacant, but under the conditions this discovery did not disquiet him; she

was, of course, in another room. He stood motionless, listening. Then he called:

"Tressie! Tressie!"

But no answering voice came.

Hurriedly he passed through the apartment, his uneasiness increasing at every turn.

*She was not there!*

In a frenzy of foreboding he dashed back to the library, scanning it for some hint that should help him to unravel the mystery.

Tressie's note with its faintly scrawled message had blown to the floor, and now espying it he took it to the window.

There were only a few words on the page.

*I can't. I ought never to have thought I could.*
*Tressie.*

Wonder at the girl's courage was his first emotion. He knew the decision could only have been reached through conquest, and he paid a sincere tribute of admiration to the victor. He had not credited the delicate, poetic nature with such strength. For the fraction of a second he was glad that she had gone — very glad.

Then something clutched at his heart.

Yes, she had gone!

But whither?

The question sent a shiver through his body.

She was a stranger in a strange land — penni-

less, hungry, unprotected from the chill of the bleak autumn weather; moreover she was, as she herself had admitted, deeply unhappy. Many a creature of her intense make-up had been goaded to desperate alternatives under far less provocation than that which she now faced. Suppose —

He shuddered.

The possibility that had arisen in his mind was too horrible.

No less distressing was the consciousness that in her friendlessness it was he who had driven her forth — he who should have shielded her with all the manhood that was in him.

"Poor child!" he murmured brokenly, a flood of remorse surging over him. "Poor little thing!"

Notwithstanding his anxiety, however, Kit was by nature an optimist who never could believe the Fates would turn against him. Therefore with characteristic unwillingness to grant harborage to the worst contingency he decided that before he despaired further he must convince himself that Tressie had not gone home.

Home?

The word echoed back into his ears with ironic emphasis.

How could she go home without money? How, in fact, ignorant of the snares of the world, could she do anything but become the prey of that great city?

Bitterly he berated himself.

Should harm come to Tressie Harlow now, a curse he never could shake off would follow him to the end of his days.

Down the stairs he rushed, buoyed up by the thought that if she had set out for home she must still be at the station, since there was yet an hour before the departure of the noon train.

When he arrived breathless in the great waiting-room he found there a throng of humanity, and in and out amid its shifting mazes he wove his way. His quest seemed an impossible one, and it was just when he came to the conclusion that he must abandon it as useless, and was casting over the sea of faces about him one last discouraged glance, that on a bench in a far corner he beheld Tressie.

She was sitting very still, her eyes closed, and the purple shadows beneath them accentuating her pallor.

In that moment when he looked at her, so pathetic in her beauty and helplessness, a tide of thanksgiving overwhelmed him that whatever the other crimes upon his soul, this child at least was no worse because of him.

Striding forward, he stood before her and spoke her name.

"Tressie!"

The tone was gentle, almost a whisper, but at the sound of his voice she started up in terror.

"Oh," she begged, "please do not urge me to go back, please don't! Indeed I cannot. I do not love you — I know that now. Besides, it's wrong. I'm going home to my uncle, to my aunt, to Wilton. You won't ask me to stay — tell me you won't."

Her fear of him stung him to the quick.

"Hush, dear! No. Don't shrink from me, Tressie. You need never again be afraid that I will urge you to leave home. You were right, little girl, and I was wrong. Forgive me, forgive me!"

Marvelling, she looked into his eyes. The pain she saw there prompted her to put out one of her slender hands and draw him to the seat beside her.

"See," she said with a smile of exquisite sweetness, "I'm not afraid now, Kit."

Screened by the moving crowd the artist lifted the hand he held to his lips.

"You must let me take you home, Tressie," he murmured in an unsteady voice. "We'll have a scrap of luncheon, buy our tickets, and be off."

He rose, welcoming this vent for his over-charged feelings.

"You are not angry?" came timidly from Tressie.

"No, dear, no — only glad."

For a moment no word passed between them; then Kit said:

"I suppose it would be useless to telegraph your uncle we are starting back."

The remark was a happily chosen one, for everybody appreciated the humor of the leisurely fashion in which the Cape delivered its telegrams. Had not Mrs. Minot brought over in the stage the message heralding her own arrival? As for the one Mrs. Mayhew had sent, it had come up from the store the next day tucked like a delivery check in a package of buckwheat.

Tressie smiled with a touch of her old manner.

"A telegram would not be the least use, Mr. Kittridge," she answered. "We should get to Wilton as quickly ourselves. Besides, Uncle Nate never has telegrams, and if one came it would frighten him half to death."

"I am afraid we shall find your family have been pretty well upset as it is," suggested Kit uneasily. "I blame myself for not sending them word this morning when we got to Boston. If I'd only had some money —" he broke off lamely.

The lack of money had not been his real reason.

"Well," he continued, making an effort to regain his customary poise, "we will get you back home now as fast as ever we can. Fortunately there is time for luncheon before we start."

Tressie shook her head.

"I couldn't. I don't look fit."

"Nonsense."

It was the old, masterful Kit who impatiently swept her objection aside.

Finding a secluded corner of the dining-room they sat down.

Now that the delirium of the morning had passed it was giving place to a calm in which each was tasting the peace of a fiercely contested victory. Yet because the shadow of the combat, like the smoke of a battlefield, still hung over them, they spoke little during the homeward journey.

It was seven o'clock when amid the gathering dusk they alighted on the Junction platform. No one heeded their coming. When, however, they sought out Caleb Trask the stage-driver, and asked him to carry them over to Wilton, the effect they produced on the old man was appalling.

"God almighty!" he cried in awed accents. "It ain't Tressie Harlow! Why, child, we'd given you up for dead. Every fisherman along the coast has been huntin' for some trace of you. The *Sylph* came ashore last night, an' ever since —"

"Oh, my uncle! My poor uncle!" broke in Tressie. "What of him, Caleb?"

"Nate? 'Twould wring your heart to see him. He's beside himself. We reckoned he'd got his death blow. Why, Wilton ain't had such a raspin' since the *Annabel* went down, with all aboard her. For the love of heaven, girl, where have you been?"

Gradually, as the rickety vehicle rocked its way over the sandy road, the main facts of the story were sketched in, and with the telling slowly into

the consciousness of the two narrators seeped with poignant self-reproach the realization of the tragedy they had created.

The man said nothing; he was too deeply moved.

But Tressie, goaded into an agony of regret, moaned:

"Oh, Kit, it is terrible, terrible! How thoughtless we've been, how selfish and cruel! We might easily have prevented at least a part of this suffering if we'd come home this morning. I never dreamed people would care —"

"Care!" echoed Caleb, who despite the gritting of the wheels had caught the final word of the whispered sentence. "Care! Why, of course we care! 'Tain't our way here in Wilton to say much 'bout the things that take a-holt of us, an' mebbe bein' here day in an' day out you got no notion of how much you meant to the folks of this town. Ain't you been one of us since you was a baby, Tressie — fishin' an' sailin' with the men like you was one of themselves? When harm befell you it hit us all. There warn't a fisherman in the place didn't toss aside everything else an' willingly offer up his life, if need be, to bring you back."

"I don't deserve it, Caleb," came wretchedly from Tressie.

"Pooh! Deserve it? 'Course you do," retorted Caleb gruffly. "As we were all a-sayin', there ain't a finer little girl nowhere on the Cape —"

"Oh, please, Caleb, please! You don't know —"

"But it's true," maintained the old man stoutly. "There, there, child — don't cry. Likely you're tired out after all you've been through; an' what wonder? Don't think of it any more. You're back home now among your own folks as love you, an' will look out fur you."

"Yes, yes!"

The words came eagerly.

Ah, she was not pale now. A blush of shame burned on her cheeks. She was reminding herself that it was hearts such as these that she had spurned, failing to value their matchless devotion at its true worth. Nowhere could their loyalty be equalled. Chastened by the scourge of suffering she knew it now as she never had known it before. As the stage rounded the bend into the harbor road, and the little hamlet of Wilton, jewelled with lights, came into view, she also owned with a throb of gratitude that nowhere was there a dearer spot than the village where she had passed her days. She had made her flight into the great world only to find it treacherous and evil. Here was safety and kindliness.

Through the soft evening haze the pines wafted their fragrant welcome, and the ocean whispered its song of peace.

Yes, she was once more back to the sweet, dull monotony of the tiny town from which yesterday

she had so madly fled. Like a returning prodigal she crept gratefully into the haven of its arms, realizing that here as nowhere else was there love measureless as the dome of the sweeping heavens, and deep as the reaches of the unplumbed sea.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE GREAT REVELATION

ALMOST before the stage came to a stop Tressie, refusing aid, had leaped out over the wheel and was stumbling through the dusk along the box-bordered path that led to the door.

So violently did her heart beat she could scarcely breathe.

Even in the murkiness of the night every turn of the old garden was familiar. How good it was to feel against her skirts the swish of the dew-weighted grass, and on her cheek the kiss of the salt mist! Once as she groped her way a leafless spur from the honeysuckle she had planted when a child caught in her hair, and despite its ruthless clutch she could have cried out for very joy. The velvet blackness enveloping everything was so dense that it was not until she had come very close to the house that she could discern its outlines.

Save for a lamp burning in the kitchen the entire place was in darkness. The curtains, however, were drawn aside, and shafts of light shining through the windows checkered the lawn with slanting patches of brightness. As one of these flashed

upon her gown it dazzled her, and she drew backward into the shadow.

She was now so close to the steps that she could look into the room.

A red-covered supper table stood in the centre of the floor, and from it her aunt, with strangely softened features, was clearing away the dishes. Opposite sat Nathan. His head was bowed, and beside him some visitor, whose face Tressie could not discern, was bending down encircling with his arm the drooping shoulders. From the faint sound of their voices she gathered that the stranger was asking questions to which he was receiving only despairing gestures of response. Perhaps no words could have pictured more vividly to Tressie than did this simple tableau the pathos of the experience through which those who loved her must have passed.

As she watched she trembled with emotion.

The courage that until now sustained her seemed all at once to ebb away.

How was she ever to make amends for the misery she had caused?

With the threshold of her home actually within reach she shrank from crossing it, conflicting impulses of dread and eagerness holding her back.

How long she might have faltered there irresolute is uncertain.

It was Kit's voice calling goodnight to Caleb that

at last forced her to action. On the pretext of paying the stage-driver he had lingered behind, and she now heard his foot on the gravel walk. Before he came, she told herself, she must go in. Nearer he came, stumbling through the darkness.

In desperation she stepped forward and put her hand on the latch.

As the door opened there was a cry incredulous with joy and wonder; a crash of dishes; a swift confusion of motion; and she was in the arms of her uncle. So tightly did he clasp her that beneath the rough coat in which she buried her face she could feel the pulsating of his heart, and the sharp intake of his breath. It seemed as if he would never let her go. Again and again, not sensing that he spoke, he whispered her name:

"Tressie! Tressie! Tressie!"

Her eyes were so blinded by tears that what followed was merely a blur.

She was conscious that her aunt kissed her hair with yearning tenderness, and that some one else pressed close beside her but it was not until she raised her head that she saw it was Norman Minot.

His being there blended into the other strange happenings with a curious fitness. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should be there to welcome her; natural, too, that on seeing him she should slip from her uncle's embrace and cling to him. In the flash of revelation that over-

whelmed her as their eyes met and he caught her to his breast, she knew that she loved him with all the strength and passion of the newly born womanhood which the travail of her recent suffering had brought into being. There was no need for spoken confession. Forced out of self by the miracle of the moment the heart of each lay naked before the other's gaze, mutely testifying to a love that had been from the beginning, and would endure to the end. All the vague, answerless longings of Tressie's nature harmonized themselves into an unutterable peace. It was this love for which she had hungered, this love with its foundations in the vast deeps of all that was divine and eternal in her human clay.

The marvel of it held her speechless.

The room was tensely still.

No one stirred.

It was as if, transfigured by the majesty of this silent betrothal, the very ground had become holy.

Death had indeed been swallowed up in victory — the victory of life, life pregnant with its potentialities for joy and pain. Into its sphinxlike face these two who had plighted their troth looked with radiant spirit. So long as they might travel the road together they faced undaunted whatever the future might hold.

Furtively Deborah wiped her eyes on her apron.

Something in the scene before her brought to her

withered heart dim regrets for the beauty and the mystery of a life which she well knew she could never share.

As for Nate, he stood transfixed by a conflict of emotions. He who had always been first, whose affection was the ripened fruit of a lifetime, now saw himself supplanted by a newcomer cloaked in the garb of a stranger, and with the halo of the unknown wreathing his brows. Only a great nature whose love sought not its own could have so completely throttled at its conception the jealousy, sadness, and loneliness that warred within him. But because Tressie was indeed dearer to him than was his own life her happiness transcended every petty consideration, and he was able to rejoice that she rejoiced; smile that she smiled; love because she loved. So well did he play his part that it was only Deborah who noted the whiteness of his lips, and sensed what the moment was costing him.

Thus was Tressie's love born, born as is all flesh through the sacrifice and the anguish of those whose thought of pain is lost in a glory of supreme self-forgetfulness.

It was Kit's step outside that brought back the realities of the every-day world.

Flushing with shyness, Tressie sought to free herself from Norman's arms; but her lover held her close, and before releasing her placed a lingering kiss on the soft lips.

Then the door opened and Kit entered, instantly dispelling the solemn atmosphere of the room.

Greetings, questions, explanations followed in a confused babel.

One could scarcely believe that the lapse of little more than a day could encompass such a tangle of calamities.

Norman Minot, it was learned, had just arrived by motor in answer to a telegram announcing the accident. He had hoped to be of assistance in the search; and failing this at least to offer some comfort to the Harlows, and afterward bring Kit's effects back to town. The grimness of his errand sent a shudder over the company. But what he did not confess was that shaken by sorrow he had been driven to Wilton to convince himself that no news of Tressie was obtainable. Why turn his heart inside-out for the inspection of others?

Thus while with his habitual reserve he locked within his breast that which he held most sacred, with a similar reticence Kit and Tressie kept to themselves the most vital issue of the tragedy from which they had been delivered. They alone knew that awful as was the doom with which the ocean had menaced them, they had been snatched from a far worse peril by the mighty, unseen power for good that worked within them.

It was a wonderful reconsecration of ideals that the little Cape Cod dwelling saw that night.

"I tell you what, there'll be an almighty rejoicin' round this place tomorrow!" declared Nate as he pushed back his chair from the belated supper-table and beamed on everyone present. "I can hardly wait to get the tidin's to Zenas Henry an' the rest."

"I could take my car and run over to the Brewsters' tonight," suggested Kit.

"Bless my soul, so you could! I never thought of that," Nathan ejaculated. "I wish to goodness you'd do it, son. Not havin' been on the spot you've no notion how upset this town's been. I figger the whole village of Wilton, say nothin' of all the men from the mackerel fleet, will be flockin' to the house when the news travels in the mornin'. I never knew we had so many friends. Where they came from I don't see. Queer, ain't it, how it takes trouble to shake people up?"

"Remember, Nathan, you've been kinder castin' your bread on the waters for years back," put in Deborah.

"I ain't done nothin' of the sort," protested Nathan indignantly.

"But ain't you lent money, an' helped folks left an' right?"

"That? Oh, that warn't nothin'," returned the man. "The little I could do I was glad to do. 'Twarn't done with any thought of hearin' of it again."

"Well, anyhow, it goes to prove kindness ain't

wasted, after all," insisted Deborah. "It gives you more faith in human bein's to find they don't forget what you've done for 'em."

Nathan eyed his sister with his great, childlike eyes.

"No kindness is ever wasted, I reckon," he replied softly. "Whether you ever hear from it or not it ain't throwed away. If you do it you won't ever regret it; it's the not doin' it you'll be sorry for."

The clock struck ten.

Kit got to his feet.

"If you'll let me have a lantern," he said, "I'll go out and get the car. You don't think it is too late to go to Zenas Henry's, do you? Probably he's been in bed for hours."

"I 'spect he has," agreed Nate, nodding. "Generally speakin', I'd 'a' been myself. I ain't set up till ten o'clock fur years. Still, I guess 'twon't do me no harm. As fur Zenas Henry, I figger he won't begrudge bein' roused up when he finds out what it's for." He paused thoughtfully, then added: "I 'spose 'twould be too far for you to circle round to Captain Bartlett's, wouldn't it?"

"No, indeed."

"An' the Bearses'?"

"I'd be glad to go there."

Nathan toyed with the links of his silver watch-chain.

"'Course Dave Furber's pretty well off the beaten track. I wouldn't think of askin' you to go there. But I'd give a good deal if some word could be got to him."

"I'll see Dave is waked up, too," laughed Kit.

"All right, lad," concluded Nate with a sigh of satisfaction. "Mebbe that batch of neighbors will do fur tonight."

"I'll start ahead, then," Kit replied. "You don't want to go with me, do you, Norman?"

"'Course he don't!" drawled Nathan before Norman had time to reply. "You don't 'spose a man whose sweetheart's just been fished up out of the sea wants to go pleasurin' with you in an automobile, do you?"

To Kit the question was enigmatic.

"Sweetheart?" he repeated vaguely.

"To be sure."

"I don't think I understand —"

"No more did the rest of us until this minute," answered Nate, a smile of unselfish joy lighting his countenance. "Still, I warn't surprised. I'm so kinder knocked of a heap by all these things a-happenin' I guess nothin' would surprise me now. More's gone on in these last two days than has been pulled off in the whole of my foregoin' lifetime put together. Last week if anybody had so much as hinted at Tressie's gettin' married 'twould 'a' bowled me clean over; but now I'm so almighty

thankful to have her back safe an' sound I'm glad to have her — married or unmarried. Besides, ain't she chosen the one man I'd 'a' had her pick, the man I'd rather trust her to than anyone else on earth?"

He placed a hand affectionately on Norman's shoulder.

"You are going to marry Tressie Harlow?" gasped Kit, looking into the face of his friend.

"Yes."

"But — but I thought —" the artist floundered hopelessly.

For the first time the memory of Dora flashed simultaneously into all their minds.

Norman shook his head.

"You see," he explained with quiet dignity, "Miss Mayhew and I have broken off our engagement. We found we had made a mistake."

"Broken it?"

"Yes. I have just left her and her mother in New York."

"Are they there now?" demanded Kit.

"They are to be there until tomorrow."

"I want the address."

From his pocket Norman drew forth a small white card.

"Thanks!"

Seizing it Kit strode to the door.

"But Zenas Henry!" sputtered Nathan aghast.

"Zenas Henry be damned!" cried Kit, as he dis-

appeared into the darkness with a jubilant wave of his hand.

Deborah, making bread in the distant pantry, heard the door slam and called:

"Has he gone?"

"Yes, he's off," Nate said.

"Well, I don't think we better wait up for him," she observed, coming into the kitchen and rubbing the flour from her hands. "Like as not he'll be out dretful late. We're all tired an' better go to bed. I'll put the key under the mat."

"I wouldn't bother 'bout it, if I was you," came dryly from Nathan. "He's pretty sartin to be gone quite a spell. As I figger it he'll breakfast in New York."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WILTON OPENS ITS HEART

THE next day, notwithstanding the fact that the Harlow homestead bestirred itself at sunrise to see Norman off for the city, its awaking proved to be none too early, for no sooner did the opalescent flush of dawn tint the bay than Zenas Henry, followed by a troop of eager villagers, came flocking in at the gate. Along the frosty grass, between glistening borders of box they straggled, a picturesque throng. Men weighed down by oars, nets, and lines who, clad for their day's toil, were off for the fishing-grounds; women with blowing hair, and cheeks scarlet from the crisp breeze; and children who, laughing and frolicking, tagged like miniature shadows behind their parents.

A smile of goodwill shone on every face.

It proved that although Kit had so precipitately deserted his post as tidings bearer his office had been more than filled by Caleb Trask, who exulting in his mission, had refused to seek his pillow until, like a twentieth century Paul Revere, he had ridden round the village and roused from slumber every fisherman within hailing distance.

As these neighbors now gathered about the doorstep out into the glory of the breaking day came Nate, and Tressie radiant as the dawn itself. Tears sparkled in the girl's eyes as she moved from one friend to another smiling, jesting, grasping eager hands, and answering questions.

Doubtless had all gone well these self-contained New Englanders might have kept forever hidden within their hearts the affection they bore the inmates of the old white house. A tragedy of the sea, however, the open sesame to Wilton fellowship, had shaken them out of their aloofness and made them utter words that only the stress of a great emotion could force from them. Ah, many were the lives the relentless ocean had drawn into its mighty arms! Scarcely a family dwelt within the town that had not at some time known what it was to listen in dumb despair for the footfall of him who never came. Fathers, sons, sweethearts, the joy of the morning on their faces, had one after another gone forth never to return, the women of their households offering up to the pitiless deep, as to some heathen idol, their lives as a human sacrifice.

Yet much as these fisherfolk dreaded, much as they feared the implacable goddess of their destinies, they acknowledged that after all they were her children, their deeply rooted love for her never faltering. The sound of her voice thrilled their being; the breath of her salt kiss awoke in their

souls a fierce delight. Stern, august, cruel though she might be, in gentler mood they knew she could also smile on them with a tenderness ineffable. Was it not to her bounty they owed the very bread they ate? Surely they were her sons and daughters, fostered by a common parenthood, and linked forever together by a common blood. To her and to each other they reached out loyal hands.

Caleb Trask had been right when he had said that the grief that came to one of their number came to all; and the joy that touched a corner of their world lighted the entire village.

Never, perhaps, until this moment had Tressie realized how completely was she a child of the hamlet, and how inseparably was her lot bound up with its people. As the sweet consciousness came to her now, the knowledge that she had vacillated in her allegiance shamed her.

"If you ain't a sight for sore eyes, Tressie!" cried Zenas Henry, catching her hand as she passed. "You'll never know, child, how thankful we are to have you safe back in Wilton. We can't spare no such skipper as you from the bay."

"An' don't forget that though your uncle's got no boat, the *Kathleen's* yours whenever you choose to sail her," John Bartlett added over the heads of the crowd.

Dave Furber was not to be outdone.

"My *Curlew* ain't so bad, neither," he laughed.

A shadow of pain flitted across Tressie's brow.

"The loss of Uncle Nate's boat is the one thing that saddens my homecoming," she said, a tremor in her voice.

"Pooh! Don't think no more about it, dear heart," blustered Nate. "What's a boat? It's only a man-made thing, after all."

"I wouldn't go grievin' over the boat, little girl," put in Phineas Taylor. "Mebbe your uncle will be havin' another some day, one that will beat the *Sylph* all holler."

With a wan smile Tressie shook her head.

"I'm afraid not," she replied sadly.

"How can you tell?" queried Benjamin Todd. "Boats can be built, can't they?"

"If you have any money to build them," the girl answered, her lip quivering.

"Never you mind about the boat, dear," repeated Nate, slipping an arm round her. "It ain't worth breakin' your heart over. Why, Tressie, I'd rather have you standin' here beside me than to have all the boats sailin' the coast!"

"That's right, Nate; that's right!" echoed Zenas Henry heartily. "Don't let no regrets for the boat cloud your pretty face, Tressie. You never can tell what may happen. Don't books say there's fairies in the sea — mermaids, an' the like? 'Tain't probable they spend all their lives lurin' sailors to their death. 'Spos'n some fine mornin' you was to wake

up an' find they'd fished up another *Sylph,* an' made her fast at the old moorin's?"

A laugh greeted the joke.

For some incomprehensible reason the sally seemed to afford everyone present unutterable delight.

Tressie, too, forced a smile, but it was a rueful one.

She knew they meant to be kind. The quip, however, cut too deeply to be humorous. The loss of her uncle's boat was no subject for jest.

"I'm afraid there are no such fairies in Wilton waters," she protested.

"Don't be too sure of that," grinned Zenas Henry.

Again there was a laugh.

To change the subject which was becoming distressing to him as well as to Tressie, Nate clambered to the porch, a sudden inspiration seizing him.

"Say, folks," he called from the height of his vantage ground, "you ain't heard all the news there is to tell. I've got another surprise for you. Tressie's goin' to get married."

A hush of consternation fell on the company.

"Yes," went on Nate, his face aglow, "she's goin' to marry Mr. Minot."

"Minot! Not that city feller?" questioned Zenas Henry in dismay.

Glancing up shyly, Tressie nodded.

"Good Lord! An' you're goin' away from Wilton with him?" the fisherman murmured, aghast.

"I'm going to the other end of the world with him if he wants me to, Zenas Henry."

So resonant with faith was the answer that it brought a lump into the throats of those who listened.

"Then we've got you back only to lose you again," remarked the man slowly.

It was at this juncture that Norman Minot appeared in the doorway.

For an instant he looked down into the upturned faces.

"You must bear me no ill-will, friends," declared he gently. "Surely if you grow such fair flowers on the Cape you have only yourselves to thank if we men from the city come and gather them."

Zenas Henry tried to smile.

"Besides," Norman continued, scanning with friendly eye the bronzed countenances before him, "I have no intention of taking Tressie away from her old home. Every summer she shall come back to you, to Wilton, and to her family. Her own people, the sea, the dunes, the pines are too dear to us both for me to cut her off from them forever."

A ripple of approval greeted the words.

"Perhaps in time," added Norman with one of

his rare smiles, "you may come to feel that I, too, belong to Wilton."

He paused.

"My people came to these shores long ago, together with yours," he went on softly. "The same great aims, the same indomitable courage that brought your fathers here, brought mine. Although our lives have diverged since then, surely with the same God above us, the same New England blood in our veins, we are of one kin — you and I."

No note of patronage marred the dignity and kindliness of the words.

An eloquent silence followed.

Then Zenas Henry's great palm gripped the speaker's hand.

"I'm kinder thinkin', son," he drawled, "Wilton will take a chance on you right away without doin' no waitin'. What do you say, mates?"

"Aye! Aye!" came in a chorus.

Closer they pressed to the steps, reaching out toil-worn hands.

Then a rattle of wheels on the sandy road broke in on the morning stillness.

"It's Caleb with the stage!" piped one of the children.

"That means I must be off," exclaimed Norman. "Goodbye, everybody! I leave Tressie in your care. Look out for her. Where are you, dear?"

With a simplicity very sweet to see the man bent and kissed her lips.

"You'll be back Sunday, Norman," whispered the girl.

"Saturday — if I can keep away until then," smiled her lover gaily.

They waved farewell to him, and watched the dusty wagon until it rounded the curve and was swallowed up in the wooded slopes behind the town; then, like the oncoming of the sunrise, the crowd melted away.

Left by herself in the old garden, Tressie lingered.

The first glory of morning was gilding the dunes, and tipping with fire the curving edge of every dancing wave. Across the fields of sedge came a heralding beam of light. Then silently out of the sea rose the sun, the monarch of a new day. Under the magic of its transfiguring touch how beautiful the dull world suddenly became! So too, mused the girl, did life glow when the miracle of love transformed it from a colorless thing to a replica of paradise.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### JOHN BARTLETT SPRINGS A SURPRISE

DORA MAYHEW and Kit were married during the Christmas holidays and took an apartment in New York, where the artist opened a studio. For a time the portrait of Tressie Harlow adorned this room, the picture — as Kit had foreseen — proving to be his finest piece of work. He had spent a month at Wilton before his marriage putting the last touches to the canvas ere it was placed on exhibition; and even after it was no longer on public view, and hung on the dully tinted walls of his workshop, critics and painters still came to see it. Many an offer for its purchase did he refuse. Why he was so loth to part with this child of his fancy he alone knew, and perhaps even he could not have put into words the feeling that prompted him to keep it. Once when Dora, half in curiosity and half in jealousy had questioned him, he had answered dreamily that the phantasy helped him to be good; then he had flushed, shrugged his shoulders, and disclaimed the assertion with a light laugh. Nevertheless he persisted in retaining the portrait. In vain did dealers and art lovers seek to coax the

treasure from his possession; irrespective of their proposals his reply was invariably the same; the picture was not for sale.

When, however, summer came, and with it the announcement of Tressie's approaching marriage, Kit ordered the canvas taken down and crated for shipment.

"It shall be my wedding gift to Norman Minot," he announced.

"But my dear Kit," objected Mrs. Mayhew, "it is a crime to bury such a notable art work in a private house. Who will see it in Boston? Already the portrait has brought you more fame than has all the rest of your work put together. You have refused a fortune for it. Why give it away?"

Kit frowned impatiently.

"Because," he answered, "there is just one person in the world to whom it belongs. If it weren't Norman's by right I wouldn't let it go at all. It means a darn sight more to me than does any money I might get for it."

Mrs. Mayhew looked puzzled.

There were many incongruities in the character of her talented son-in-law which she was powerless to unravel. Nor was he an easy person to wield. Proud as she was of him she feared him just enough never to consider it prudent to annex herself to his home. Instead she had taken a house nearby, where she was gradually drawing about her

a coterie of those to whom her lavish entertainments appealed, and who were not too critical either as to her intellect or her forebears. To these satellites she was fond of interspersing her conversation with references to "my son-in-law, the well-known portrait painter." As time went on she even came to feel that Kit's genius was more than a compensation for Norman Minot's blueness of blood.

"A celebrated man like Kit has the entrée everywhere, Dora," she would argue to her daughter with as much complacency as if it were she herself who had made the match. "Beside that, New York is, after all, our native sphere. The life here is much more cosmopolitan. We never should have fitted into Boston."

Probably could Boston have voiced its opinion it would have concurred with this verdict. Certain it is that Mrs. Minot took Tressie Harlow to her heart with a fervor she never had exhibited toward Dora. All the common fibres of their New Englandism reached out and intertwined, the one with the other. So long as there was a foundation of old Puritan ideals a difference in social status, which in reality was merely the result of opportunity, could be overlooked. There was one ancestry, one tongue, one code of morals between them. Natural refinement, even though it be unpolished, was in Mrs. Minot's opinion, far preferable to a veneer of culture.

Therefore she welcomed with motherly tenderness the girl of her son's choice, whose future life in the old Boston home it henceforth became her ambition to render happy.

It was in June when honeysuckle and wild roses decked the Wilton marshes and violets dotted the copper matting of the pine woods, that the wedding took place.

The splendor of summer flooded the sky, shifting to an expanse of molten gold the tossing ocean.

Early in the day the neighbors were astir and were off to the hills in their wagons to cut branches of green that should transform the barren interior of the village church into a bower of beauty. Busy fingers toiled throughout the morning twining the arches, and festooning the chill white walls until they were buried in the soft forest verdure Tressie loved so much.

At noon the entire village, resplendent in stiffly starched garments, began assembling. Nor was Wilton alone represented. Long before the hour set for the ceremony, dusty wagons filled with guests who had left home almost at dawn came toiling over the highroads of the Cape. Weather-beaten fishermen who for a lifetime had cast nets alongside of Nathan Harlow, and to whom Tressie was dear; women raw-boned and sharp-featured from the ravages of poverty and hard work; even the life-saving crews from the out-lying districts

had sent hither such delegates as could be spared.

Norman's friends, too, were there. The few who had been nearest and dearest to him now came to see the Hurdler take from Destiny's hand the greatest prize life has to bestow.

And when into the church stepped Nathan with the hand of the girlish bride beneath his arm how solemn was the hush!

Tressie's beauty was not a novel sight in the hamlet; nor had the simple white gown she wore power to enhance her loveliness. Nevertheless there was in her face a new radiance that dazzled even those accustomed to seeing her.

As Norman beheld her, once again there came before his vision that day in the past, when with reverent wonder he had watched her at the tiller of the *Sylph*. The same mystic light now shone in her eyes as when her gaze had been lifted to that dim, far-away horizon, and she had seemed to see a gleam that beckoned her on. At the moment he had asked himself what was the phantom hand that lured her — hope, ambition, fame? Now within his soul he knew that it had been none of these things. She had been following the star of a great love.

Might he, he prayed with humility, keep her feet in its pathway, and the glory of its lustre ever before her.

The church was very still while the minister read the few words that symbolized so much; but at the

end of the service there was a quick transition from solemnity to rejoicing.

Zenas Henry had begged the privilege of driving the bride and groom home, and all the morning in anticipation of the event he had been occupied in giving Samuel, his salt-and-pepper mare, *such a scrubbin' as never was*. It was indeed a gala equipage that approached the church steps. Clusters of roses graced the horse's ears, Abbie Brewster sacrificing every blossom in her garden to the festivity. In the meantime Phineas Taylor had wound the whip with white, while Benjamin Todd, wishing to have a share in the artistic pageant, had interlaced the spokes of the wagon wheels with tendrils of ground pine. At each side of the carriage, like a guard of honor, walked a surging mass of fishermen. As they moved down the harbor road they were all in the brightest of spirits.

An abnormal excitement possessed them — an excitement out of all proportion to the occasion, stupendous as it was.

Once inside the gates of the Harlow homestead this mood increased until there threatened to be no restraining it. There were whispered consultations; mysterious journeyings into the road to urge on those who lagged behind. When at last everyone was assembled in the shaded garden John Bartlett pressed forward through the throng.

His cheeks were red with embarrassment, and the

collar of his Sunday shirt was sadly wilted; but the kindliness of his face was a benediction.

"I ain't much on speech-makin'," he began, mopping his brow with his massive bandanna. "Come to think of it I don't believe I ever talked to mor'n three folks at once before in all my life. Still, somebody's got to speak for the crowd that's here today, an' I'm the victim."

He waited an instant, smiling on those about him.

"There ain't nothin' I can tell you about Tressie Harlow. You've all known an' loved her since she was a wee slip of a thing; an' there ain't one of us but thinks the man as gets her for a wife oughter be prouder'n cuffy."

His listeners gave a cheer.

"Nor is there much I need say 'bout Norman Minot. He came a stranger among us, an' without makin' much of a stir he's got to be a son of the village."

More cheers arose.

"Then there's Deborah," went on the coast-guard. "There ain't a woman in this place is more respected, or who can make better apple-pies. As for Nate, the old rascal —"

A burst of affectionate laughter greeted the orator.

"Well, you know what he is — a gambler what's pitched his pennies all over Cape Cod, from Provincetown 'most as fur as Boston. But somehow he

ain't never been a very lucky gambler. Though he's tossed pocketfuls of coppers into the air, none of 'em ever seemed to get back to him again. Some of his nickels an' dimes have landed in your lap, some of 'em in mine. It didn't give him no concern where they went, or appear to worry him if he never saw 'em again. There was one thing, though, he didn't reckon on, an' that was that the folks that got 'em would remember it."

"That's so!"

"Aye!"

"But they did," went on John Bartlett earnestly. "One an' another remembered; an' those rememberin's kep' a-rollin' up until, last fall, when the *Sylph* went down, so many folks remembered that somethin' had to be done about it."

A roar of delight went up from the crowd.

"You know, an' I know," resumed John Bartlett, "how we got together, an' how ever since we've kept the biggest secret the Cape ever had in all its history. But today the time's come for us to break the silence; there ain't no call to keep the secret any longer. Norman Minot will, in the order of things, take his wife to Boston with him, I 'spose. But there's one Tressie he can't never rob Wilton of, an' that's the *Tressie* that's floatin' this minute at Nate's moorin's in the bay. She's a stanch little craft, an' just as near the model of the *Sylph* as her builders could make her. It kinder seemed" (he turned to

the girl on the steps beside him). "It kinder seemed," he repeated, "that instead of givin' you a weddin' present 'twould make you happier if we turned over to your uncle, who's goin' to miss you, a namesake as will fill in the hours for him when you ain't by. So we, Nate's friends, who set an' almighty store by him, are givin' him this boat. May she out-race every yawl in the harbor, an' know nothin' but favorin' winds an' fair weather!"

How they cheered then — men, women, and children! What a waving of handkerchiefs, clapping of hands, and tossing of caps into the air!

Poor Nathan! Too overwhelmed by surprise and emotion to utter a syllable, he stood speechless. Tressie's eyes, too, brimmed with tears.

Hence it was Norman Minot who came to the rescue with a neatly turned phrase or two that made everybody laugh, and gave Nate a grateful lapse in which to steady his trembling voice before he tried in a few broken words to thank his neighbors.

Then nothing would do but the entire assembly must make a pilgrimage down the harbor road to the shore to see the new boat.

There she drifted, snow-white in the sunshine, resting on the blue breast of the bay like a mammoth swan. They talked of her lines, of her delicate bow, of her masts and sails; they discussed every gleaming inch of her timber, every nail that

studded her structure; they scrutinized her fore and aft, and pronounced her flawless.

"She's a darn sight better craft, Nate, than that *Sylph* you've been mournin' over," announced Zenas Henry. "All of which goes to prove that sometimes there's no tellin' in this world what's a blessin', an' what ain't."

"There's one thing, anyhow, that's for sartin a blessin'," replied Nathan with beaming face, "an' that's good friends!"

FINIS







